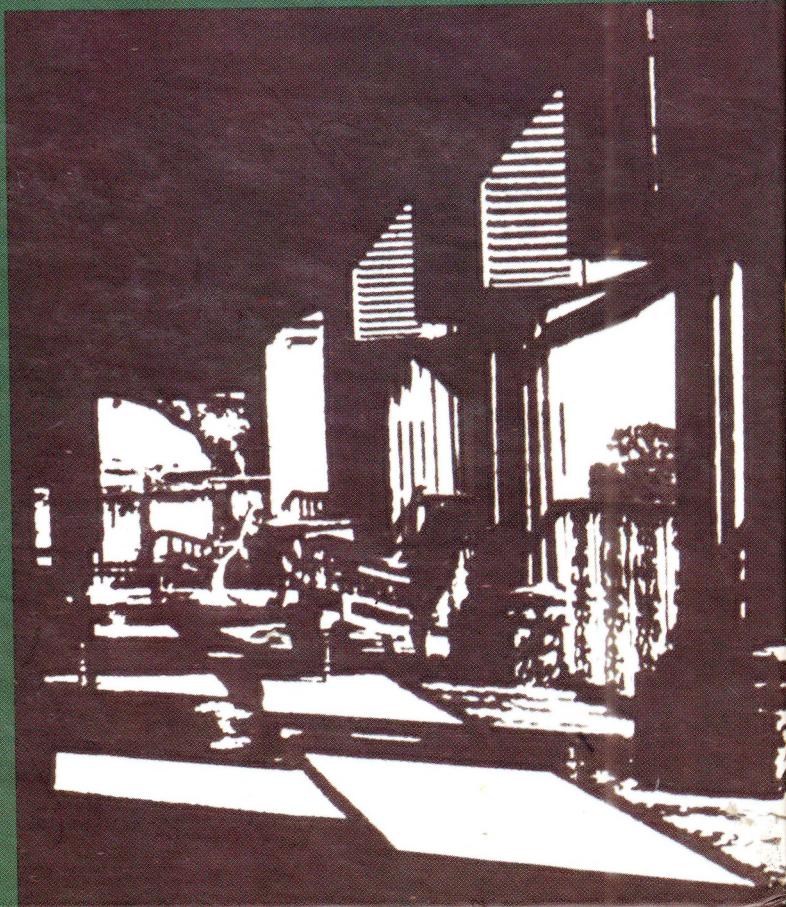


# THE SOUTHERN VERANDA

Mohonlal Gangopadhyay

Translated by Swati Ray



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*Translated by*

**Swati Ray**



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Kolkata 700 013

**THE SOUTHERN VERANDA**  
by  
**Mohonlal Gangopadhyay**

Translated from original  
Bengali – ‘Dakshiner Baranda’  
by  
**Swati Ray**

(Swati Ray taught English at Basanti Devi College, Calcutta for 37 years. She retired in 1996. She translates at her leisure.)

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It is brutal to think we failed as too short to make any comment on my dear Swati's translation. In fact, it is very rare down my spine as I try to translate my emotion into expression. Yet I have tried to pen a few lines on what I felt after going through the whole length of Prof. Swati Ray's translation of Monomial Chandidas's *Dukhinesh Bhakti*. Translating Monomial's characteristic Bengali language into English is a very easy task. It is a dangerous game. But Prof. Ray has successfully done it.

This translation is dedicated to our dear departed mother  
Nirmala Dutta

*She was a great human being. She was perfect in everything. I'll never see the likes of her again.*

Though it is very difficult to make Monomial's unique and original narrative art reappear vividly in English version, the translator has done a lone untried and arduous unexplored to preserve the tenor and flavour of the original work. The difficulty lies in the theory of free translation and literal translation are generally called as "writers". The charge of faithlessness is very often made against them. Faithfulness is not necessarily very difficult. There is no such thing as perfect or faultless language. The *Southern Koran* says, "As to have made an attempt to strike a balance between the two, that is a rare literary quality Prof. Ray possesses to every environs". Reading the book is a reward.

Dr. Jayanta Kumar Chakrabarti  
[Ex-Principal, Charchika Evening College, Cuttack]

## Foreword

To be brutally frank, my intellect is too short to make any comment on my dear Swatidi's translation. In fact, a shiver runs down my spine as I try to translate my emotion into expression. Yet I feel tempted to pen a few lines on what I felt after going through the whole length of Prof. Swati Ray's translation of Mohonlal Gangopadhyay's *Dakshiner Baranda*.

Translating Mohonlal's characteristic Bengali language into English is no easy task. It is a dangerous game, but Prof. Ray has successfully played it out.

The purpose of translation is defeated if it fails to render the readers more eager and curious about the original work and its author. The simple and lucid style of Prof. Ray whets our curiosity as to what are there in store for us in the chapters that follow, and inspires a desire for reading the original by Mohonlal. Herein lies the paramount success of the present translation-work – *The Southern Veranda*.

Though it is very difficult to make Mohonlal's individual style and narrative art re-appear vividly in English version, the translator has left no stone unturned – no avenue unexplored to preserve the feel and flavour of the original work. The difficulty lies in the thorny issue of free translation and literal translation. Translators are generally called 'traitors'. The charge of faithlessness is very often made against them. Faithful translation is not necessarily very elegant. There is either faithful ugliness or faithless elegance. *The Southern Veranda* seems to have made an attempt to strike a balance between the two. This is a rare literary quality Prof. Ray possesses to a very enviable degree. Reading the book is a rewarding experience.

Dr. Syamal Kumar Chakrabarti  
[Ex-Principal, Charuchandra Evening College, Calcutta]

## Translator's Preface

*The Southern Veranda* – the reminiscences of Mohanlal Gangopadhyay, son of the famous litterateur Manilal Gangopadhyay and grandson of the great artist Abanindranath Tagore, is a superb piece of literature. In it the author recounts the days of his childhood and early youth that he had spent at Calcutta's Jorasanko with his renowned grandfather. He does not describe the pomp and grandeur of Jorasanko House built by Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, but returns to his childhood and re-lives in his memory those glorious days of innocence and gaiety that he had experienced in that house. With child Mohanlal we delve deep into the child-mind of Abanindranath – how he would collect the small bits of things and preserve them in the holes of his desk, how he had become a party of the children when they published a hand-written magazine, how he had taught them to make salt just to dissuade them from joining Gandhiji's Salt Movement, how he had rendered active help when they planned to enact a play. In all these, the grandfather was no less involved than his grandson. This book is a tale of such endless adventures that happened within the four walls of a house and its premises.

I have been tempted to translate this book because it unveils to me the juvenility of Abanindranath's character, his delightfully captivating ability to be as charming and child-like as his grandson. Besides depicting the different facets of his grandfather's splendidly idiosyncratic character, Mohanlal throws light on his friends and relatives and the life of his time. Throughout the book there is an undercurrent of melancholy and pathos as those days of sunrise and gaiety were passing away. The owners of the Southern Veranda, three remarkable personalities of the 19th century Bengal, would leave the house dejectedly never to return, and the building itself made by Dwarkanath Tagore would be demolished leaving no trace of the magnificent activities that took place there.

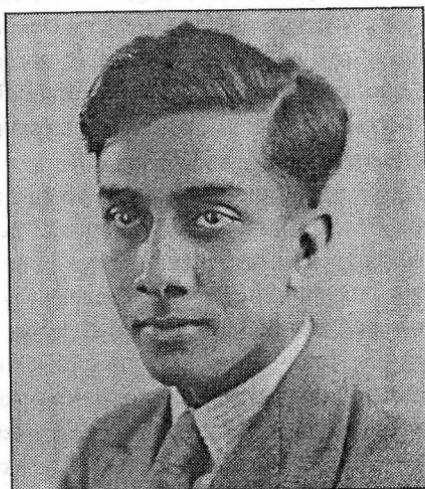
With Abanindranath's trilogy – *Apan Katha*, *Gharoa* and *Jorasankor Dhare* – Mohonlal Gangopadhyay's *The Southern Veranda*

completes the nostalgic memoirs of Abanindranath the artist and his time. Each of these books, because of their delicate delineation and subtle nuances of language and style, their blissfully innocent, almost naive and yet marvellously evocative depiction of an age that is no more, used to find a place in the heart of every Bengali reader. How I wish that non-native readers too may stumble upon these gems of Bengali literature and find in them a source of endless joy! If my feeble attempt as a translator can evoke some interest in such readers, my efforts will be justified.

I wish to express my gratitude to all the people involved in the preparation of this book. I have been variously helped by many including my friend and erstwhile colleague Dr. Chhanda Chakraborty who helped with the translation of several Sanskrit slokas, my niece Rinku Sarkar who typed out the manuscript and Ms. Nancy Stewart who went through the manuscript several times and offered her valuable suggestions. I remain grateful to them. I am also deeply thankful to Dr. Syamal Kumar Chakrabarti for his sincere help and support from the very inception of the work till its very publication, and he urged me to carry on even when I was surrounded by the gloom of despair. I also express my heartfelt gratitude to Sri Rabi Ghosh, an unfailing friend of ours and the director of the Indian Publishing House as well as his son Dipankar Ghosh and all the employees of Indian Publishing House who extended help at different stages of preparing the manuscript. Finally, I must express warm appreciation of my son Subhamay Ray's assistance and emotional support for the completion and publication of this work.

Swati Ray  
Kolkata

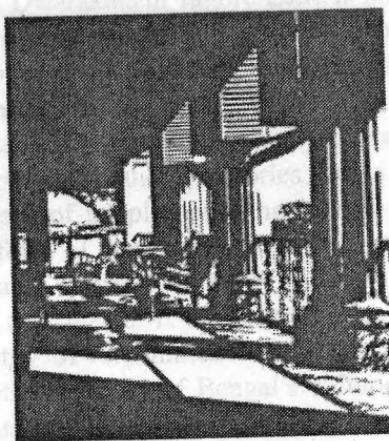
26th January, 2012



### **Mohonlal Gangopadhyay (1910 - 1969)**

Son of Manilal Gangopadhyay, a man of letters, and Karuna, Abanindranath's daughter, Mohonlal had lost his mother in early childhood and was brought up under the care of his grandfathers – Gaganendranath, Samarendranath and Abanindranath. At the end of his college education, he went for higher studies to the London School of Economics. When he returned, he was shocked to see the sorry state of their ancestral house. He then wrote *The Southern Veranda* – his reminiscences about his grandfather's house at Jorasanko, Kolkata. His book can be considered as a sequel to the trilogy his grandfather wrote – *Gharoa*, *Apan Katha* and *Jorasankor Dhare* and unfolds the half-forgotten history of a memorable period and an extraordinary family.

## ‘Prologue’



# THE SOUTHERN VERANDA

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## ‘Prologue’

The house at 5, Dwarakanath Tagore Lane is no more. Nor is the southern veranda of that house or the people who used to repose there. Gaganendranath, Samarendranath and Abanindranath lived in that house from their birth till their twilight years. Every nook and corner of that house, every particle of it and each day of that southern veranda were interwoven in their memories. Some of those who had witnessed the stream of people gathering in that house, who came under the shaded folds of that southern veranda, are still alive. They know and perhaps remember many incidents – and some reminiscences of that house. It seems that even a few years ago many events worthy of remembrance took place in that veranda. Many a chapter of the history of Bengal’s cultural life was enacted there. Yet that house could not be saved.

Today that house is wiped out. Those of us who have been born in that house can visualize even with closed eyes the portico, the broad wooden staircase, the library, the southern veranda and the garden encircled by coconut trees. We can also see those who stood for the life of the house and those who assembled there, attracted by the inhabitants and thus made the atmosphere of the house all the more appealing.

After the owners left, the house fell into the hands of property dealers. Then the Government took charge of it with a view to preserving it as a national heritage; but, instead of saving its glorious past, they demolished the house and raised a huge edifice in its place.

This was the outhouse of Prince Dwarakanath Tagore. House No. 6, the huge building built by the ancestors around the rectangular courtyard, constituted the inner apartments of the house and the drawing room was the outhouse, where women of the family were forbidden to enter. It was built by Dwarakanath himself to entertain luxuriously his guests, native and foreign. After his death his eldest

son *Maharshi*<sup>1</sup> Debendranath used to live in the same house along with his brothers. When Dwarakanath's second son Girindranath died, his widow went to live in House No. 5, known as the outhouse. Girindranath's son Gunendranath and his grandsons Gaganendra, Samarendra and Abanindra were brought up in that house. That old outhouse built by Dwarakanath himself does not exist anymore. Its shadowy memory still lingers in the minds of a few. Even that will be wiped off with their demise.

I would never have attempted to write what I have placed on record here if that house had not been dismantled and razed to the ground. I do not know what an unseen and mysterious knot ties these two events. After the extinction of the house in which I was born and the homely fold in which I grew up, something resembling a south wind would escape through the chink of an endless vacuum to overwhelm my heart. That feeling vindicated the desire to write. That was why I wrote. This is neither a memoir, nor a history. This is like allowing the delicate touch of the vernal wind to embrace me as I sat in the southern veranda and glanced at the fleeting clouds.

Once I dared to ask Rabindranath the English word for the egg of a fish. I was then only eleven and he was sixty. In the sultry weather of a summer midday he was writing alone in the western room of the second floor. I had just managed to learn the word by looking up a dictionary. Gathering ample courage I entered the room and breaking the afternoon silence, I asked him, "You have been to so many countries. Can you tell me the English word for the egg of a fish?"

"The English for the egg of fish is 'roe,'" he said.

"No, it's spawn. I have seen the dictionary."

"Oh, you want to fight me with a dictionary. Come, let me tell you the difference between spawn and roe." Saying this he put off his writing and began to talk with me like an intimate friend.

What is there in what I have related here? It contains neither any advice nor history nor a mere statement of facts. Yet, it lingers in the depth of my mind like the pleasant touch of the mystic south wind. This is all my say. Here is my inscription.

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<sup>1</sup> *Maharshi* – a great saint

## Chapter 1

"Keep thy shop and the shop will keep thee."

Invaluable advice. Such was our *Dadamashai*'s<sup>1</sup> guiding dictum in our childhood. It manifested in every step of his life. He never threw away anything. He had fondly kept every little bit of things, small or broken, slight, neglected or old. He preserved them with care and made use of them. Maybe great artists look at things with such a mind. We did not understand all this. Nor did we know why small toys and paltry, neglected objects were appreciated by great artists. We only knew that in the southern veranda at Jorasanko, where our Dadamashai used to paint sitting on a stool, there would be something to his right that neither truly resembled an almirah nor a box or a shelf. We used to call it Dadamashai's desk. Its bottom contained a few drawers while the top had a few holes. In those holes were precious items. What a wide variety of objects came out of these holes! It was a matter of wonder for us that whenever and whatever we needed, we always had it from our Dadamashai.

One summer evening Dadamashai sat on a reclining bench in the round garden at Jorasanko. We, the youngsters, were playing. While we were playing something dropped onto the grass from someone's pocket.

He was fast to pick it up and put it back in his pocket, when Dadamashai's eyes fell on it.

"Let me see what you are putting in your pocket."

The boy timidly opened the cupped palm of his hand.

It was a bit of red glass resembling an egg, a broken piece of something.

"Where did you get it? This is a broken piece from Dwarakanath's lampstand. Have you noticed how beautifully it has chipped? It looks like a rock-bird's egg. Are there any more? Bring out what else there is in your pocket." Nothing else was there. The boy said that he discovered it long ago among the heap of torn papers in the *kachhari*<sup>2</sup> room. The wretched boy's face withered in apprehension. He was

<sup>1</sup> *Dadamashai* — grandfather.

<sup>2</sup> *Kachhari* — zaminder's court and office

afraid of being dispossessed.

"Did you get it long ago? What do you do with it?"

"It's always in my pocket. Sometimes I handle it and play with it."

Dadamashai's face began to glow in happiness. Staring at the boy for a while he said, "No, you have the eye to see and your choice is appreciable. Now go — it's time to play."

Even now sometimes I wonder if our Dadamashai was not highly tempted to get hold of that fine and delicate piece of cut-glass that belonged to Dwarakanath Tagore. He must have had such a desire. If he could procure such another, he would have carefully preserved that broken piece of glass in a hole of his desk.

Once I had got a black knife to sharpen pencils. Father gave it to me, a knife from Kanchannagar. It was a great delight to sharpen pencils on my own and with my own knife. In my enthusiasm I would cut this and that, and in so doing the blade of the knife was broken.

I was dazed. How fond was I of that very useful knife! And now it was broken into two! Life seemed distasteful. I was worried. I did not know of any gum that could join two pieces of iron. Finding no other way I sought Dadamashai's help.

With the broken blade in hand, I went to Dadamashai in the southern veranda and asked, "Dadamashai, can you join pieces of iron?"

He replied, "It's not that I play with the sword. The brush is my plaything. But, what is amiss?"

I showed to him the wretched condition of the knife.

"Oh, is it this? Wait — let me see."

He drove his hand into a hole on the right; from there he brought out a pot-bellied, round, red wooden bowl filled with various objects. For some time he handled those pieces in the bowl in search of something. Then, pulling out the blade of a knife he said, "Keep thy shop and the shop will keep thee. Come, now give me your tooth and take mine."

Saying this, he dropped the broken blade in the round wooden bowl, as though it were the hole of a mouse. Then, giving the blade into my hand, he said, "I cannot set it in the handle. That Harinath knows — call him and learn from him how the blade is put in the handle."

I did not expect so much. Not only would I get a new blade, but could I learn how to set the blade on the handle? I rushed to call Harinathbabu.

Harinathbabu was a clerk in the office. With a big face full of black beard he would sit with folded legs all day in the office room behind a low desk placed on a cot covered with a white sheet. We had rarely seen the Accounts Book on his desk. Almost never did we find him writing in his Accounts Book. Our curiosity found it irresistible to know what was there in his desk, but he never opened his desk in our presence. Still we knew that, like our Dadamashai's, his desk was also an invaluable mine of various little objects, necessary or unnecessary. Prior to his service in our house as a clerk, Harinathbabu used to work in a musical instrument maker's shop. He could make violins and *esraj*<sup>3</sup>. I had heard that he was a very good workman, well versed in various types of workmanship. For all these reasons Dadamashai liked Harinath most among all the clerks. We did not know how Harinathbabu was promoted from the instrument maker's shop to the estate office of the Tagores, but I believe Dadamashai was instrumental in that.

While leaving the musical instrument maker's shop, Harinathbabu brought with him various small implements. With the gentle strokes of these tools he went on working all through the day. Whoever had something to repair – be it the children's toys, the grown-up's sewing box, the ink-pot, the leg of an almirah or the window-pane – Harinathbabu would be called for. It was he who brought a mechanic when required. He knew well in which lane to find a good mechanic for a particular job. All the small repair jobs he would do by himself.

Once during the rains while I was playing in the playground, my foot fell on the mud and the bone of a walking fish entered my foot. A crow might have thrown it into the mud and I did not notice it. I tried to pull out the fish-bone, but it would not come out. It penetrated quite deep into the flesh. Besides, the saw-like teeth of the fish-bone seemed to bite into my flesh in such a manner that it caused great pain when pulled. I was much frightened, for if the doctor came, he would cut the toe with a knife and put out the bone. Nothing seemed more frightening than that. Wiping my tears, I went limping to Harinathbabu in the office room hoping that he might find some way

<sup>3</sup> *esraj* – stringed musical instrument played with a bow

out with his tools. He pulled my leg onto the carpet and looked at it through his spectacles. Then he brought out something like tongs and drew out the thorn in a trice. All my pain vanished and the process did not hurt me at all. Harinathbabu had a peculiar skill in doing such things.

From him Dadamashai learnt how to make *rolam*<sup>4</sup> which Dadamashai called *bajraprolep*, an ointment as strong as thunder.

One afternoon I was doing sums with my teacher when Dadamashai shouted from the veranda, "Come here. I'll teach you how to make thunder-strong ointment."

My teacher was astounded.

Putting off my mathematics exercise book, I went to Dadamashai. He was making flour dough, adding with it a pinch of slaked-lime. A painting brush-box had been broken, and thunder-strong ointment was being made for its repair. "Pick it up," he said, "It will help you in future. It is more useful than your mathematics. Mind you don't teach anyone else. I have gathered this recipe from Harinath. Is he a person to teach me his device easily? With this adhesive he used to repair musical instruments. Now, see how I prepare it."

Saying this he taught me how to prepare thunder-strong ointment.

That day my mathematics exercise came to an end there.

Harinathbabu came to our first-floor veranda with a few tools, a small hammer, a triangular file, small pincers and a chisel.

Dadamashai said, "See, how good is the hammer! I would buy it, if I get such another." Much later, I found that Dadamashai had managed to get a similar one.

My broken knife was repaired quite easily. Harinathbabu was so skilful.

Handing over the repaired knife to me, he asked, "Where is the broken blade?"

Before I could say anything, Dadamashai smiled and said, "That I kept to myself."

Both of them were equally tempted by the broken blade of the knife. I noticed a strange similarity between the two members of the House of the Tagores – one a landlord and an artist, and the other his employee and a mechanic.

"Keep thy shop and the shop will keep thee."

<sup>4</sup> *rolam* – a kind of adhesive

## *Chapter 2*

Dadamashai went to Ranchi for a change of air. We all went with him. He would wake up before anyone else and go out for his morning walk with a stick in hand. Whenever he went away from home and irrespective of where he stayed, he always had a stick in hand. He had a collection of sticks and was very fond of them. There was also a beautiful cherry wood stick. He had such a wide variety of sticks! Sticks made of cane and bamboo, some excellent European ones and those bound with silver plate and brass plate – sticks that were slender, thick, straight or crooked. The stick he walked with in Ranchi was shod with a piece of pointed iron. With that stick, he used to poke into the stone in the hills of Ranchi.

I also went to search for stones with Dadamashai whenever I woke up at dawn. That was a wonderful experience. Although Dadamashai knew what kind of stones might be expected in a particular valley, we often came across new varieties in familiar places. While we listened to Dadamashai speaking on stones, the pebbles seemed to play hide-and-seek with us. They seemed to be living things, hiding on this side and that, in this creek and the one beyond; and our game was to seek them out. Dadamashai had a specially gifted eye to play these games. While walking he poked suddenly amidst dust, sand or a clod of earth; and at once darted out a piece of pebble of a beautiful shape. Perhaps a hairline crack was seen in the midst of grass and something glistened through it. But Dadamashai's glance was certain to fall there – and he had to bring it out.

I also looked out for stones, but my eyes fell only on pieces of mica. Dadamashai did not even touch them. He used to say, "These are useless. Your eyes are yet missing the jeweller's glint. Search for diamonds, look for them. If you are to search for anything at all, let it be diamonds. What will you do with mica? Diamonds do not glisten lying upon the ground. They remain hidden under the earth and have to be dug out."

Along with my Dadamashai, I also dreamt of diamonds.

Dadamashai used to come back, collecting various kinds of stones.

Coming home he washed them in water, and after being washed, they sparkled. How many varieties of astonishingly colourful, unknown stones came out. Amidst those, there would be crystals transparent as water that looked almost like diamonds. Although they resembled diamonds, a real diamond would never appear. Dadamashai often chose one or two big ones and remarked in a tone touched with mystery, "It seems there is a diamond in it. Let us break this one."

His words sent a lightening flash to my mind.

"Bring the hammer," he ordered.

Putting the hammer in my hand, he used to say, "Strike, hit gently on that spot." But I did not feel like breaking the beautiful stone. Dadamashai went on cheering me up, "Strike with the hammer. Who knows, a diamond may abruptly come out."

I put the blows very carefully, but Dadamashai grew impatient and began to strike hard on his own. The stone split into pieces; however, no diamond came out of it.

When I grew up I came across people who collected leaves, flowers, oysters, feathers of birds and butterflies. But I did not find anyone collecting stones.

Dadamashai had always gathered stones whenever he went outside Calcutta. This habit of his I noticed in Deoghar, Ranchi, Darjeeling, Kurseung and on the Khoai of Santiniketan. It was a wonderful game indeed! In the name of searching for diamonds he had collected a wide variety of wonderful stones. Back in Calcutta he displayed them to all. Bardadamashai and Mejdadamashai also saw them with great wonder and admiration.

Dadamashai had a funny stone which looked exactly like a piece of bread. It was used to befool several people. If it was served on a plate, no one could guess that it was a piece of stone. While trying to put it to their mouths, they understood by its weight that it was a piece of stone. An abundance of laughter followed. Dadamashai used to have some stones polished. After being polished, hard and rough stones became smooth. These were the most alluring ones, as their colours were amazingly beautiful; fine was their transparent and diffused lines and pleasing was their cool touch. To me those stones seemed more precious than diamonds.

Still Dadamashai was always searching for diamonds. He would

not be satisfied till he got one. Once while searching for diamonds he came across a wonderful stone from a completely unexpected spot. Let me narrate that.

Whether it was Deoghar or Ranchi, I am not sure. Coming back to Calcutta one morning, Dadamashai began to examine the stones one by one. The stones were heaped up on a long wooden table. We all had assembled on the southern veranda, where Dadamashai in a *lungi*<sup>1</sup> sat with folded legs on his hard wooden chair. On his right there was a large basin made of German silver, full of water, and placed on a three-legged stool. He was picking up the stones one after another and dipping them into water. On his left Mejdadamashai was engaged in reading a book. On his right Bardadamashai was printing a picture. We were taking each stone from Dadamashai to his two brothers. Dadamashai said, "This stone I had picked up in the evening, when its colour was like the sunset glow, but in the morning it turned white."

"Interesting! Let me see. I shall have to see it once again in the evening."

"It doesn't look like a stone at all. It's like a piece of velvet."

"Yes, it may be used to make a doll. It seems to be wearing a velvet garment."

This is how the brothers talked among themselves.

The piece of stone was appreciated by turning it over and over again, throwing light on it and touching it. We were standing around in expectation. We knew that many a stone would be split on that day, but no one knew what was inside. A diamond might dart out. That was our main attraction and interest.

Round pebbles were set aside. Pushing aside the transparent quartz, Dadamashai said, "These are not diamonds, yet resemble them. They only deceive."

Then taking two rounded, rough and rugged stones, he said, "Break these carefully with a chisel. Let's see what is within."

He put a piece of stone in my hand and commented, "See how light it is. It's hollow, but there are rows of diamonds studded in it." Then he handed over to me the hammer and chisel and asked me to break the stone. My heart began to palpitate. How was I to open its shutter? Moving aside I said, "I can't do it."

<sup>1</sup> *lungi* – a long loin cloth worn mostly by the Muslims

Then Dadamashai himself made a lump of dusting cloth, put it on his lap, placed the piece of stone on it and began to cut it with a chisel. Breathless we stood to see what would follow. Bardadamashai stopped painting his picture in black and white with Chinese ink, while Mejdadamashai closed his book.

Continuous strokes on the stone produced a crack on its body. We all stopped to see what happened. Suddenly it seemed that what was joined uncoupled. To our great surprise we saw that the stone was really hollow and its inner surface was adorned layer upon layer with beautiful bluish grains like those of sugar candy.

At once I cried, "It's a diamond!"

At that moment we firmly believed that the diamond mine we covet so much was shining before us.

Dadamashai remained silent for some time. Then he said, "These are not real diamonds. There are called the teeth of a mountain."

Alas! If this is not a real diamond, what is a real diamond then? We were all crestfallen.

By then Dadamashai began to break another stone of the same kind. It was harder, and even heavy strokes failed to break it. Then suddenly it split into four pieces and scattered around. One of the fragments flew off to the corner of the veranda's railings.

"Hey – see, see!" Dadamashai shouted. "The diamond is flying off." We stumbled upon the piece of stone and picked it up.

This one was also hollow and there were rows of grains like those of sugar candy. Because of heavy strokes some of the broken grains were scattered and we picked those up from the floor. Dadamashai was still carping at us, "Seek out minutely if a diamond has shot out of it."

Not finding a diamond, Dadamashai became depressed. Once he stood up himself to see if a bit of diamond fell somewhere. Then he arranged the stones and put them away.

Next morning Dadamashai was strolling in the garden. He had still the habits of Ranchi and therefore, though in the garden of Jorasanko House, he was trying to find a stone. He was moving around the garden and repeatedly came to the spot beneath the veranda hoping that he might come across one or two pieces of the stone dropped in the garden yesterday. Who knows if there might not be a piece of diamond in them? One of my maternal cousins, a little girl, was

loitering just beneath the veranda close to the staircase. Dadamashai noticed that she picked up a bright piece of something, glanced at it briefly and quickly put it into her mouth.

Fast came Dadamashai to her and asked, "What have you put into your mouth?" She opened her mouth and something like a piece of glass was seen inside.

"Get it out at once."

When it was brought out of her mouth, it seemed to be a peculiar stone like a pod of tamarind, brown in colour. When held before light it looked transparent, and strangely enough, a bee was frozen just in the middle of it.

"The wretch must have fallen from above. I have been musing about this since yesterday." Saying this he came up to the veranda above with the stone in his cupped palm. Then he called us to see it. No one could guess how that fossilized but faultless insect could come to the garden of Jorasanko. We youngsters were amazed.

Whether it was a broken piece dropped from among the stones brought by Dadamashai or from somewhere else, ever remained a mystery.

Dadamashai made a ring by inlaying that stone and he often wore it. Many had seen that ring on his finger. It is kept carefully till today by my eldest maternal uncle.

"It is not in my lot to get a diamond," Dadamashai used to say, "but what I have got is not of little value."

Said he,

"Wherever there's ash

Blow it away, and see:

Who knows, for gems precious

May await thee!"

## Chapter 3

There are more stories about the search for diamonds. This time diamonds were sought not on hills and in lakes, on riverbanks or in the midst of the *Khoaiyee*, a wasteland strewn with broken stones. Now it was sought in Calcutta proper, even at Jorasanko.

For many years Dadamashai had not been away from Calcutta. How could he search for diamonds? Rust gathered on the pointed blade of his stick. But he still dreamt of diamonds. He handled the old stones and washed them repeatedly in water and examined them again and again. With a chisel he would poke into the stones. In the past he used a chisel to split the stones and see what was inside. Now he did not want to break and spoil the perfect stones. Rather he used the chisel softly and with gentle strokes created wonderful figurines. It was a matter of wonder how, with so few knocks of his chisel, he could bring out the figures so easily.

Many believe that towards the end of his life Dadamashai began to make, *kutum-katam*<sup>1</sup> with stones and boulders, sticks and branches and motley fragments. But he began to do it not in his final years but long before when he used to cut the stones and arranged and rearranged them. All these constituted his *kutum-katam*. "These are all my kins," Dadamashai used to say. They were always with him; when he sat, when he roamed, when he rested or wandered, he would arrange them in order and looked at them from many angles. That it could never be carved out of a branch, roof, stone or a small lump was the chief feature of *kutum-katam*. He would only cut off and reject what was redundant. Thus with the least break or tear he would bring out the true image of the created object. This we had always seen in our Dadamashai.

For a few days he had been wandering about with a piece of stone in his pocket. *Tuk-tuk, thuk thuk* – repeated strokes fell on it. But the stone was quite hard and the chisel's knocks could not break

<sup>1</sup> *kutum-katam* – *kutum* is the short, colloquial form of *kutumba* (relative, kinsmen). *Katam* is an 'echo word' of *kutum*. These echo-words usually signify "and so forth". As a whole the term indicates the kinship Dadamashai felt with what he created, i.e. he considered those creations his relatives

it easily. Even then a figure was emerging out of it. Dadamashai always carried it in his pocket. Whenever he sat, he placed it in front of him and looked at it from different angles. When he had finished his observation, he dropped it again into his pocket. One day he visited the Indian Society of Oriental Arts which we called 'Society'. There the Oriya workmen Giridhari and his son Sridhar worked with stone. Both were expert sculptors and had made excellent stone sculptures. Dadamashai called Sridhar and asked him, "Sridhar, see the stone." Sridhar shook the stone, and with a look of surprise in his eyes he watched that a figure was on the verge of emerging out of it. Neither Sridhar nor Giridhari ever worked with such a hard stone.

Dadamashai said, "See, here, this bit of stone, Sridhar. Can you blow it off?" Saying this, he pointed to a particular spot.

As Sridhar was going away with the stone, Dadamashai called him and said, "Mind you, only this bit and no more. Cut it off with the chisel, but please don't 'finish' it."

He held the stone in his hand and showed him the particular spot, pointing at it with his nail. With the stone in hand, Sridhar went to the corner of the room where he kept his tools.

When he went some distance, Dadamashai called him again, "Please don't try to give it a finished look. Only this bit has to be cut off." Sridhar paused and then proceeded again.

Dadamashai then stood up and said, "Let it remain, Sridhar; you may give it a finished appearance. Better give it to me." Saying this, he took the stone from Sridhar and once again dropped it into his pocket.

He could not remain unworried even by putting the stone in the hand of that expert sculptor of Orissa. The craft of *kutum-katam* was not so simple.

My *Didima*<sup>2</sup> had once broken a white stone dish as it slipped from her hand. It was an expensive dish of older times, the like of which is not available now. *Didima* was much aggrieved, but Dadamashai was overjoyed. He asked us to bring the broken pieces and wash them.

Whenever he had a piece of stone, it had to be washed in water. The stone looked brighter after washing and the lines in it appeared more distinct.

<sup>2</sup> *Didima* – grandmother

Dadamashai sorted out a piece and said, "See, what a fine picture is here. Who can keep it hidden within? It must break and emerge."

We did not find any picture, but Dadamashai at once began to work with it. Strangely though, with the taps of his chisel we found the beautiful shape of a girl emerging on the stone. It took a day or two for the work to end. When the last stroke of the chisel fell on it, it no longer remained the broken fragment of a dish. It was then a picture, a splendid image carved in stone.

Showing it to our Didima, he said, "Take it. This is your broken piece of stone. Now it is more precious than a new one."

After this incident everyone searched for broken pieces of stone bowls from this corner and that, this shelf and that niche, and placed them before Dadamashai. At that time he carved out beautiful pictures from broken bowls and dishes.

When Dadamashai was thus thoroughly engaged in cutting stones, came the sudden news that our *Kattababa*<sup>3</sup> was coming to Jorasanko with his retinue. Right from the beginning of the rainy season, we had been hearing that *Varshamangal*<sup>4</sup> was going to be performed in our house. By then the rains were almost over. When Kattababa reached Jorasanko, it was said that this year's performance would be called *Sesh' Varshan*<sup>5</sup>. There would be songs about the rain clouds, autumn's deity of wealth and even the *seuli*<sup>6</sup> flower.

For several days rehearsals were held in right earnest in the Jorasanko House. Besides those who came from Santiniketan, many people from our house also joined the group. As it happens, when preparations for acting began, both the houses were full of excitement and enthusiasm. Our three Dadamashais remained almost always in the other house; witnessing rehearsals and offering advice. What a throng used to visit the house at Jorasanko in those days! It looked like a village fair. The rehearsal too was not thinly attended. It wasn't like any other rehearsal, was it? Kattababa himself conducted it from beginning to end. In fact the rehearsals seemed more enjoyable than the actual soirée.

At last *Sesh Varshan* was performed consecutively for three days

<sup>3</sup> *Kattababa* – great grandfather, Rabindranath Tagore

<sup>4</sup> *Varshamangal* – the cultural programme of dance and song on the rains

<sup>5</sup> *Sesh Varshan* – the last rains

<sup>6</sup> *seuli* – a white fragrant autumnal flower

in the yard of House No. 6 at Jorasanko. A vast crowd assembled. The lane of Jorasanko, its veranda, its courtyard and our hearts and souls were all full of a feeling of grandeur.

Then on the last day when we returned home from the last performance and just began to feel our heavy hearts, suddenly we were told that *Sesh Varshan* would be staged once more. It would be performed before the King and Queen of Belgium who would come on a visit to Calcutta. Once again our minds felt invigorated. Preparations began with great zeal for a show of *Sesh Varshan* before the royal personages. There went about a rumour that some donation for Santiniketan was expected.

It would be a royal affair, the visitors being personal guests of the Governor General himself! Grand, velvet-covered armchairs were arranged for them to sit on. They were placed on wide platforms and looked like the 'royal box'.

In the evening before the play began, the royal personages arrived with their retinue. On that day too the yard was full of spectators and the acting was at its height. But Dadamashai did not enter inside. He had already seen what he wanted to see and made a sketch of it all. He had also painted several pictures. In fact he never came near royal personalities, great men and men of reputation.

Outside the yard there was a crowd of men and cars. Dadamashai saw from the veranda above that a British sergeant stood leaning against a motorcycle. He had escorted the royal personalities and guided them along the way from the Governor General's house. The King and Queen with their companions went inside and were regaling themselves with music while the poor fellow who escorted them over fields and habitations was not even noticed by anyone. This was not at all to our Dadamashai's liking.

He came down from the veranda, went to the sergeant and said, "Sir, they all went inside. Don't you want to go?"

The gentleman felt embarrassed. He was very willing to hear the songs, but he was a servant after all! How could he go in front of the royalty to attend the performance? What would the King think if he saw him sitting there?

Dadamashai said, "Is that it? Don't worry. You will be seated just behind him, away from the direction the King faces. The King and the Queen will not know of your presence." He then took him to the darkened backdoor of the yard and pushed him inside.

Dadamashai was content only after making the *sahib* sit in his proper place.

When the performance of *Sesh Varshan* was over, Dadamashai said to Kattababa, "Rabi uncle, even a sergeant has given a certificate of approval to your *Sesh Varshan*." Kattababa's face beamed with a smile.

Thus the performance of *Sesh Varshan* ended. The next day Dadamashai woke up at dawn. He called us and said, "Come, let's visit the courtyard of the other house once."

We had always been elated overmuch whenever we had a call from Dadamashai to wander with him. Therefore, we all went. We did not know why we were going there. In the empty yard there were chairs, couches and benches. On another side of the yard the stage was erected. To wander amidst these was itself a delight. Perhaps that is why we went there — who knows. When the preparations for acting went on and the stage was erected in the yard, the place became very attractive to us. With what an unknown touch the very ordinary, useless yard that was there forever suddenly took on the halo of a mysterious and alluring world. On entering the yard Dadamashai went straight to the velvet-covered couches where last night the King, Queen and their peers sat in such pomp and splendour.

Dadamashai said, "Search carefully. See if a diamond can be found. After all, it was a royal affair. They came to see an opera; it is certain that diamonds and jewels adorned them. Will not one or two of these be scattered on the ground? Search thoroughly. Turn things upside down. Do you think it is easy to find a diamond?"

All his life a lover of diamonds, he searched for the best of all diamonds, the Kohinoor. How could he be oblivious of diamonds?

We all became very excited. It seemed quite real to us that the royal personages might as well scatter handfuls of diamonds. We began to search everywhere minutely.

Dadamashai joined us in the search. He said, "Why seek beneath the couch? Drive your hand in the openings, for diamonds may have dropped there. Your hands are thin — penetrate within the couch."

With great enthusiasm we searched for a small diamond that day. I sought whole-heartedly for a small diamond, a very small one that dropped off the Queen's bejewelled crown. Alas! Why didn't I get it! Oh, how happy I would have been if I found one!

## *Chapter 4*

The garden of Jorasanko House as we saw it in our childhood was strangely attractive. We had heard that long before our birth it was, what we call, a 'decorated garden'. We knew what a decorated garden means when we would go to the houses of our rich relatives on invitation. There we had gravel walks with pebbles strewn over a base of brick-dust hammered thoroughly into the soil – on both sides the edges were lined with slanted bricks. Well-laid flowerbeds circular in shape stood in the middle of the green ground covered with trimmed grass. Laboured shackles of geometrical lines and circles on a well-levelled land. Fortunately the garden of Jorasanko House was not like that.

Our garden was an absolute domain of holiday, even as it stood amidst the ever-busy brick-wood-iron-cement-laid city of Calcutta. We heard that once upon a time many gardeners used to work in the garden of Jorasanko House. However, in our time their numbers dwindled to two. One of them was Bhagabat whom we used to call the head gardener. At one time he was really the chief gardener, a leader to all his subordinates. Now he had only one under him and his subordinate's name was Jogi. Yet we called Bhagabat the leader. Our garden never looked like a head well-trimmed at a salon as it was under the care of only two gardeners – the trees were at liberty to grow according to their will and wild grass, and *ulu*<sup>1</sup> and *mutha*<sup>2</sup> sprang gleefully amidst grass of finer qualities. But it was a matter of wonder to us.

We had a 'round garden'. It was round in shape and surrounded by a tile-paved road. In the middle of this garden there was a cockle-shaped fountain instead of a well-laid flowerbed. It was made like that under the instruction of Dadamashai. The fountain was always full to the brim with water. We used to sit on its edge, and in the middle of it, on an island, there were two houses made of china clay. Seen through the screen of drooping leaves they would appear as the royal palaces of fairy tales.

<sup>1</sup> *ulu* – a kind of reedy grass.

<sup>2</sup> *mutha* – a kind of grass with aromatic roots.

In our garden there was no tank. That deficiency was made up by the brimming transparent water of the fountain. When it rained, we ran to our round garden. At the entrance of the garden there was a platform for *madhavi*<sup>3</sup> and *chameli*<sup>4</sup> creepers on the tile-paved road. We used to stand under the shade of that flowery platform and see the torrents of lashing raindrops in the water of the fountain. Frogs laid eggs and tadpoles moved turning their tails in water. In front of our eyes the water would gradually expand. It seemed that the shadows of two unknown royal palaces fell on the lake of an unknown land.

Just beneath the southern veranda was the swing garden. On one side of it there was a huge mango tree; on another there was a pomegranate tree and the bush of a yellow flower smelling like a ripe jackfruit. Close to it there was fencing made of *kunda*<sup>5</sup> creeper. The most interesting feature of the garden happened to be by this fencing. That was a swing, and the garden came to be named after it. It was not exactly what we mean by a swing. A piece of plank thirty forearms in length and one forearm in width was placed on two stands at a height of two-and-a-half forearms. This swing extended from one end of the garden to the other. The plank had a wonderful spring. We kiddies, fifteen to twenty, used to sit on the swing together, but it never crumbled nor twisted. One or two of us stood just in the middle of the plank and, with bent knees, rocked the swing. The plank moved wave-like up and down with the wind, and those who sat in a row thought that they were tumbling up and down on a wave.

Such a big swing was not used only for the purpose of swinging. Often we sat on it in a group just to gossip or to see the snake charmer's game, *Bansbaji*<sup>6</sup>, monkeys' dance, the dance of *Bahurupee*<sup>7</sup> or that of *Kahabati*<sup>8</sup>, we sang together in moonlight and then when boys from the Santiniketan School came to stay in Jorasanko House to perform the musical drama of Autumnal Festival, how many hours did we spend with them on the swing, noisily and

<sup>3</sup> *madhavi* – an evergreen creeper with flowers

<sup>4</sup> *chameli* – a sweet-scented white flower like jasmine

<sup>5</sup> *kunda* – a variety of multi-petalled white jasmine

<sup>6</sup> *Bansbaji* – acrobatic feats or games shown on bamboo poles

<sup>7</sup> *Bahurupee* – an itinerant showman who amuses by assuming various forms

<sup>8</sup> *Kahabati* – dancing girls who told stories along with their dance

cheerfully!

To the east of the round garden there was a big garden. It was so called because it was the largest. It was our playground, grassy bed and our realm of repose. To the south of this garden was a row of coconut trees and a deodar tree. Close to the deodar stood a shaggy *bakul*<sup>9</sup> tree beneath which the ground was always dark and damp, and it felt eerie to go there alone in the evening.

Among the large trees in the garden there were *sisoo*<sup>10</sup> and *krishnachura*<sup>11</sup> trees. Besides, there were jackfruit, *sitamalati*, *mahaneem*, *Aroceria* tamarisk trees. Among the smaller trees there were guava, shaddock, *champa*, brownia, *gandharaj*, ground lotus, *karabi*, *babla*, *jabo*, *karamcha*, *bel*, *kathmallika* and *rangan*. There was also a cocoa tree, not found perhaps in any other garden. In addition there were a few bamboo scaffolds on which were *chameli*, *uberia*, *kanthalichampa*, *nabamallika* and *nilmanilata*. These plants and creepers grew under the care of Sardar and Jogi and often without any care at all.

Our Dadamashai planted a mango tree long before we were born. This was not a very big mango tree like that of the swing garden. The big mango tree was very old and its fruit sour. We had heard that the mango tree planted by our Dadamashai was *himsagar*<sup>12</sup>, but it had not yielded any fruit yet.

Dadamashai used to say, "Just you taste it when it yields fruit. It was planted by your Mejdadamashai."

"Oh Mejdadamashai, when will your tree yield fruit?"

"Let it grow. Then it will yield fruit."

We would wait with patience.

Every year the mango tree grew taller. Growing continuously, it outstripped the *baburchi*'s<sup>13</sup> kitchen in height. We went up to the roof of *baburchi*'s kitchen, tore off the leaves of the mango tree, broke its branches, inhaled its smell and pined for when those branches would be loaded with fruits, when the rounded and juicy mangoes would be hanging among the leaves. Once some buds

<sup>9</sup> *bakul* – a large evergreen tree with white sweet-scented flowers

<sup>10</sup> *sisoo* – a gregarious tree

<sup>11</sup> *krishnachura* – a tree carrying red flowers, Royal poinciania

<sup>12</sup> *himsagar* – a variety of mango

<sup>13</sup> *baburchi* – a Muslim cook or chef

appeared, but they yielded no fruit. At last one winter the *himsagar* tree became loaded with buds. Bardadamashai ordered the gardener Jogi to protect every fruit of that tree. Not a single mango of that first year's harvest was to be wasted. What an abundance of buds appeared that year on both the *himsagar* tree and the tree of sour mango. Then came the fog of the month of *Magha*<sup>14</sup> and the mango buds fell off as abundantly as they sprouted. Very small mangoes appeared in the month of *Chaitra*<sup>15</sup>. Every morning our Bardadamashai went down to the garden with Jogi and would strain his neck upwards to see how many mangoes came out on each branch. Then in the searing rays of the month of *Baishakh*<sup>16</sup>, the small mangoes began to drop. Then came the nor'wester. The gusts would come one upon the other and lash the garden, even as we watched from the southern veranda the branches of the tree shaking off the mangoes. Thus the number of mangoes was reduced to only one.

The storms of *Baishakh* had then ceased and we, all the inmates of the house, engaged ourselves doggedly in preserving that single mango. Our Dadamashais came down to the garden from time to time to see the mango. They also tried to inspect it from the southern veranda. The mango, however, played hide-and-seek behind the leaves. Whenever they missed it, they shouted: "Oh, please keep a watch on it — maybe the mango is lost." Jogi the gardener was spending sleepless nights. The mango tree was at one end of the garden, close to Madan Chatterjee's lane, and we were always afraid lest somebody from that lane might steal the mango.

However, in the end the sole surviving mango was saved and it ripened. A *himsagar* mango was to be plucked when it was still green, because it did not change colour when it ripened. The gardener Jogi climbed the tree now and then to see the condition of the mango.

Then one summer morning when all the Dadamashais were seated in the veranda, the eldest and the youngest engaged in painting while Mejdadamashai was reading a book, Jogi entered with the mango on a plate.

<sup>14</sup> *Magha* — the tenth month of the Bengali calendar (from the middle of January to the middle of February)

<sup>15</sup> *Chaitra* — the last month of Bengali calendar (from the middle of March to the middle of April)

<sup>16</sup> *Baisakh* — the first month of the Bengali calendar (from the middle of April to the middle of May)

Bardadamashai said, "Let me see." He took it in his hand, smelled it and said, "Yes, it is quite ripe. Rinse it with water. Aban! Will you taste it?"

Dadamashai said, "You are to taste it first. Give it to Samar-da next and then to me."

Mejdadamashai turned his neck and looked at it from beneath his spectacles.

Thereupon Jogi reentered with the newly washed mango and a bright knife on a plate.

That mango was the fruit of how many days and years of hope! Bardadamashai put away his brush and picked up the knife. He turned the mango in his hand, observed it from different angles, cut a small slice carefully from a corner, put it into his mouth and remarked, "Oh! How marvellous! Now give it to Samar."

Jogi carried the plate to Mejdadamashai. He too cut a slice, put it in his mouth and then looking meaningfully at Bardadamashai said, "It tastes really very sweet." And then addressing Dadamashai he said, "Aban, it's your turn to taste it."

Dadamashai saw that the greater part of the mango was kept for him. He put aside the picture he had been painting, washed his hands in water kept in a basin and drew the plate of mango to his lap. Then addressing Jogi he said, "Take away the knife."

Removing the skin of the mango he put a bite on it and cried, "Fie on it! It is poisonously sour!"

He looked alternately at his two brothers and then all three burst into hilarious laughter.

Hearing the loud noise of laughter we ran and saw that the half-eaten mango was rolling on the ground. The gardener Jogi stood flabbergasted but the eyes of our Dadamashais were full of the glow of fun though the *himsagar* mango became sour forever.

## *Chapter 5*

There was a thatched hut between the big garden and the round one. It was open on all sides – that is, it had no walls. There were three iron benches and an iron table on the floor. On the round head of the table there was the latticed design of Chinese Zodiac. On one side of the room stood a bougainvillea creeper and on the other a bunch of unknown foreign creepers. Both the plants were very old. Their thickly entangled branches looked like black ropes which climbed up to the roof and almost covered it. The thatched roof of the hut seemed to have been decorated all the year round by an awning formed of dense green leaves. Through the openings of those branches and leaves, carefree birds built their nests, bees made hives. That foreign plant had an enormous growth. Shrouded by its dense leaves the bougainvillea flowers could not blossom while the plants' own branches were full of small white flowers all through the year. Swarms of flies got clogged in those white flowers. Nobody knew the name of the plant, neither Jogi nor the head gardener. This was our summer-house, our shelter, our cozy abode. Suppose we had been playing in the garden when suddenly it began to rain – at once we would run to our summer-house for protection. When, because of uninterrupted rain during the rainy season, we felt tired staying indoors, we sought refuge in that tree-shaded room. When we sat on its iron bench, it was a delight to see the frolic of raindrops on the grassy plot of the enclosed garden. How often we ran away to its cool, soothing shelter in the scorching heat of midday in summer and regaled our ears with the tireless cry of a dove coming from its shady roof.

A part of this summer-house was covered by a net, and in that part there was the dry stock of a tree with branches. This was once the cage for Dadamashai's birds. He used to buy flocks of birds and put them in that cage. They perched gaily on its branches for a few days, taking water and grains. Then gradually he set them free. He believed that if he set them free, they would remain within the bounds of the Jorasanko garden. Where else would the forest birds take refuge in a city? Jorasanko garden was almost an 'oasis' for birds,

so they would have to return to it. Even if they tried to escape, they would be back again to this garden.

For quite some time the birds indeed stayed in that garden. Flapping their wings they bathed in the fountain of the round garden. Perching on the *sisoo* tree they whistled and gulped worms and insects. Sometimes they also took grains. Then gradually their numbers began to dwindle. Nobody knew to which forest those wild birds fled leaving the oasis of Jorasanko. When all the birds left the garden, Dadamashai again bought a flock of birds. Again they were kept in the nest for a few days and then they were set free in the garden. To charm and deceive them, nests were built on the branches. Bushes, thickets and small flower gardens were grown to give them a safe and secluded life. Dadamashai wished that they would build nests, give birth to their offspring and rear a family. Beguiled by the trick, the birds remained in the Jorasanko garden for some time. Then, suddenly, the irresistible call of the forest would reach them one day and all the forest birds would leave the garden.

We had not witnessed this game of Dadamashai's. We had only heard about it. But we had seen traces of his play in the net-covered nest of the summer-house.

It was a wintry midday, quite cold and delightful indeed to sit with your feet stretched under the sun. We, a few boys, were warming ourselves under the sun in the 'Summer-House'. A refreshing sunshine peeked in from the south over the *hijal*<sup>1</sup> tree and fell on the stony floor of the summer-house. Suddenly we noticed a strange and wonderful bird on the China house of the fountain in the round garden. It was a white bulbul. Bulbuls are always black, and a white bulbul is unimaginable. We could not believe our eyes. So we decided to catch it. We could not sit still any more. Perhaps noticing our restlessness it flew away with a shrill cry and perched on a *sisoo* tree.

I ran to the first floor veranda to inform Dadamashai of the white bulbul. Dadamashai became highly excited. Leaving his painting he stood up and said, "Is that so? Let me see. Have you seen correctly?"

"Yes, I have seen it right enough. It has perched on the *sisoo* tree."

A huge *sisoo* tree stood to the east of the first floor veranda. Its

<sup>1</sup> *hijal* – a kind of tree, the Barringtonia Acentengula

huge trunk split into two and rose towards the sky like two arms. There were branches, twigs and leaves in between these two arms. One day a Japanese garden-painter pointed out to our Dadamashai that if those useless branches were lopped off, sunlight at dawn and the full moon in the evening would appear like pictures through the opening. Accordingly, branches were cut off and we saw the *sisoo* tree like that. Through these two arms how many a full moon resembling golden saucers have we seen!

Like a prince the crested white bulbul was perching proudly on the *sisoo* tree. Seeing the bird Dadamashai said, "You are right. It's a Persian Bulbul, indeed – a Shah Bulbul." Hearing that it came down to the fountain he said, "It will come again. Don't make a noise. Set the cage and let us hide in the summer-house."

Dadamashai had to leave his painting. A bamboo cage was brought as well as a little flour of barley and a few bananas. Dadamashai ordered, "Hang some little red paper torn from a kite on the cage. The bird will come attracted by the colour." Doing all his bidding we hid ourselves in the summer-house. There were many children and quite a crowd in the house. News was sent to everybody that a white bulbul came to the garden. Attempts to catch it were being made. Let no one make it fly away by making a noise.

When the big building went quiet, the white bulbul came again to the fountain. This time, however, a black bulbul appeared with it.

Dadamashai said, "See what a partner it has brought with it." After some time both the birds perched on the cage.

Dadamashai commented, "It has recognised its cage. It is sure to get caught."

We were all in a flurry of excitement and waited with bated breath while our hearts thumped.

At last, attracted by flour and banana, the white bulbul entered the cage, but the black one remained outside. What could we do now? Dadamashai sent me, "Go, close the door quickly."

I crawled moving as quickly as possible, but the job was not so easy. It was the Shah Bulbul of Persia and it had flown away through the open door before I reached the cage.

Dadamashai stood up saying, "Alas, it fled! You must have forgotten to tie a thread to the door of the cage."

On that day we did not see the bulbul again. We returned home

depressed as we had lost all hope to trap the bird. Dadamashai, however, was never lacking in enthusiasm. He said, "See what a garden we have built in the midst of the city so a Shah Bulbul comes flying from Persia."

Next morning while engaged in painting on the veranda, Dadamashai jumped up abruptly. He had heard the shrill cry of a bulbul — *pick, pickru*. He began to shout, "Mohanlal, Mohanlal; come sharp. This must be the cry of a Shah Bulbul. See where it has perched!"

Leaving my studies I ran to the veranda, and together we began to search the trees one by one. At last we noticed a white dot among the leaves of the deodar tree.

Silently we placed the cage by the side of the fountain in the round garden. Dadamashai came down to the summer-house and said, "See, he must come to the side of the fountain to drink water." This time we remained ready by tying a thread to the entrance of the cage. Waiting patiently for some time, we saw that both the birds, black and white, were perched on the cage. After some time the black bulbul, rather than the white one, entered the cage.

"Pull the thread."

As soon as the thread was pulled, the black bird was trapped, but the sound of the falling door made the Shah Bulbul fly away.

Dadamashai then confined the black bird in a bamboo cage and set the door of another cage ajar and said, "This time the white bird will come for his companion." But the white bulbul, once gone, did not return. Then one day it appeared again with a new black bulbul as its new mate.

We left our daily chores like bathing and eating. All day long we ran after the white bulbul. It was a long wait. Now it hid itself in such a way that nowhere could a hint of it be found. Then suddenly a shrill scream was heard. We could at once guess that it was the call of the Shah Bulbul. We waited and waited, opening the door of the cage. Thus we spent a whole winter midday in the summer-house, and Dadamashai was with us. He could not, however, catch the white bulbul.

The bulbul almost charmed the garden. It cooed from one tree to another, and the caged bulbul responded to its call. Amidst their calls was suddenly heard the shrill cry of the Shah Bulbul — *pick, pick*,

*pickru!* What was most surprising was that whenever the white bulbul came to the fountain, it always brought a black bulbul with it. Often it perched on the cage and even conversed with the caged bulbul. However, it never entered the cage. It went inside the cage only once.

Black bulbuls foolishly went inside the cage and got caught. Once when a black bulbul was captured, the Shah Bulbul did not look at its companion any more and flew away to seek a new mate.

That time we caught many black bulbuls one after another, but we missed the white one.

Dadamashai said, "It's a dangerous bird. Who knows who came from Persia in the guise of a bird?"

Then, at the advent of spring, the Shah Bulbul fled away, never to return. Perhaps leaving the garden of Jorasanko, it went to some small, green, fountain-washed Persian garden.

With that our duty to remain present all day at the summer-house came to an end.

## *Chapter 6*

Right from our infancy we came in contact with writers and their works. Besides our Kattababa, Dadamashai and Baba, we saw many other writers who came to Jorasanko House, and this inspired us to write from a very young age. But how could we write? We were greenhorns and our knowledge and intelligence were scanty. We sadly conveyed it to Dadamashai that to write a story we required a plot. How to find a plot?

Dadamashai said, "Don't worry. Don't you dream? Write down your dreams and the story will come of its own accord."

This was a novel idea to us. We reckoned that dreams often appeared to us like stories indeed, and sometimes they seemed better than stories. All that we needed was to write them down.

Dadamashai said, "Those of you who will have dreams will come to my veranda tomorrow morning. Write down your dreams and only then begin your studies."

Next morning, when our teacher came he was stupefied to see Dadamashai's arrangement. Two sheets of Serampore Paper were cut longitudinally into four pieces and attached with gum. Dreams were to be written on them one after the other and rolled up like a horoscope. The thing would be called a 'packet of dreams'.

That day we did not forget any of our dreams. With eyes still laden with sleep, we came to the veranda trying our best to remember our dreams. The main flaw of a dream was that it escaped before we woke up and left no trace in our mind. Dadamashai bade us to write our dreams even before our studies and it was much better and more interesting than the studies. If dreams were partly forgotten, they could be concocted without being detected by anyone.

Our teacher just waited and waited, closing his books, while we went on writing down our dreams, one after the other. In this, our first inspiration, we must have somewhat exaggerated our dreams because it seemed that the flow of our narration would not come to an end. We were all unskilled in writing, many of us still not in command of Bengali spellings. That morning we went on penning through and altering at places and dipping the pen in the inkpot instead

of doing our studies. Then Dadamashai said, "Ask your teacher to write a dream for you."

We did not let go of it. On the first date recorded on the packet of dreams we made our teacher write a dream. The hour for study passed, but we did not open our books. Our Serampore Paper, the southern veranda and even the hour for study came to be filled with dreams. Thus rolled on our packet of dreams, and it continued for quite a long time. Dadamashai himself and many of our elders wrote in that packet. Dreams were often read out.

One of Dadamashai's dreams was very fine. He had gotten a new kind of *vina*<sup>1</sup> which he was trying to play sitting in a corner of the roof. The sky was overcast, the wind riotous. The cloud swelled up like a puffed-up sail and then was torn into pieces. The sunlight, like a golden thread, was falling now and then on Dadamashai's lap through the broken cloud. Just then music resonated from the *vina*. Whether the music was produced by the string of the *vina* or by the ray of light could not be known. The *vina* was on Dadamashai's lap and his hand rose and fell. Now the *vina* began to play – now it was silent. Now the sunlight was shrouded by clouds and now it emerged like a golden boat. This was his dream! We could never have dreamt of such a dream. It was a piece of poetry. We tried but could never dream like Dadamashai. How could we? Dreams do not appear at our bidding. Dadamashai's dreams were beautiful like a delicate, well-written composition while ours were dull and insipid. This was ever our discontent.

Dadamashai used to say, "Do I dream like you, only with eyes shut? I also dream while awake. One day you too will dream such dreams."

Our zeal for the packet of dreams continued for some time and then it ebbed away. By then we became expert in writing dreams. We wanted to do something more and told Dadamashai, "We want to publish a handwritten magazine."

Dadamashai said, "That's fine. Call it *Deyala* which means the infant's smile while dreaming in sleep. So let *Deyala* be the title of your magazine."

Our enthusiasm swelled as we instantly got a name. Our preparations began. I was made the editor. So, on me rested a huge

<sup>1</sup> *vina* – a kind of musical instrument

load of work. I bound an exercise book, covered it and wrote '*Deyala*' on it in bold letters. Then I managed to collect a composition from Dadamashai. He wrote a small story entitled '*Deyala*'.

...All a slumber – trees, leaves and meadows, men lying on the floor in a hut. They all dream that their shadows have been lengthened. That tiny shadow which wanted to see the end of the meadow, to fly away as a bird with the flock to the verge of the sky – has now become larger than wilderness and the blue sky. Trees and meadows, dizzy in fear, are startled now and then; and they dream and smile while dreaming – they cry, look around and sleep again. Bats swim silently in darkness, moving towards distant lands in search of shadows. Then, light enters stealthily – just a shade of moonlight which lights up the air. Sleepily they all murmur – Is it the shadow? The bird, waking from sleep, says, "See, there's the shadow." The tree, startled, comes out of its reverie and looks at the shadow.

What next?

...The shadow of a small plant asks the tree, "What's the news today?"

The tree says, "Do you know what I see today?"

The shadow says, "What?"

The tree says, "Today the bud that hid under the leaves has bloomed."

The shadow asks, "What then?"

The tree replies, "The butterfly came to see it spreading its wings!"

The shadow asks, "Then?"

The tree says, "Sunshine fell on it while the wind rocked it."

The shadow pleads, "Give it to me."

The tree only says, "See, what a beautiful flower!"

Clasping the flower the shadow exclaims, "What a beautiful flower!"

The flower remains quiet.

The shadow says to the tree, "The flower doesn't speak."

The tree replies, "It's asleep – don't awaken it!"

The flower sleeps on the bosom of the shadow.

The shadow moves and looks at the flower.

Shaking its body the tree asks, "What is it doing?"

The shadow replies, "Sleeping."

And then at some time the wind comes and blows on the flower. The shadow says, "Our flower is smiling in her dream."

Opening the wicker door of a hut a man notices the blown flower under the tree and the shadow caressing the flower lightly. The son of the hut-dweller comes out, plucks flowers and wanders among trees.

The tree asks, "What will you do with the flower?" The boy replies, "I'll play with it," and leaves the place after plucking flowers.

Now comes a girl. She is so small that she cannot reach the tree, but she only collects flowers from the shadowy ground under the tree.

The shadow asks, "What will you do with the flower?"

The girl says, "I'll string these into a garland." The shadow further asks, "Then? Will you give these back when your frolic is over?"

The girl replies, "No I won't." Saying this, she picks up the flowers in her loincloth. Clasping her feet the shadow implores, "No, please don't take them."

Comforting the shadow the tree says, "Let her take them. Tomorrow morning you will find that your flowers have come again flying to your bosom."

Days and nights pass. The tree and its shadow together dream of the flower. The morning buds blossom on the tree and the flowers return to the lap of the shadow.

This was the first story of '*Deyala*'. I copied it at once.

Dadamashai said, "You too start writing."

We all began to work with paper and pencil. The editor had no longer any worry about the collection of compositions. I had managed to get one from father, another from our teacher. In this way we had gathered enough compositions to fill the magazine for about two months.

I was copying the writings. It was about the second or third of the month of *Baisakh*. Our readers became impatient. Everyone was peeping over my shoulder with a query of when the first issue of *Deyala* would be published. The first issue was to be fault-free, and so everything was to be done with extreme care. Some pictures were to be drawn here and there. This delayed the publication. One day after copying for the whole afternoon, I had almost finished the first

issue when suddenly Dadamashai came and asked, "Has your magazine been filled up? Keep some space for a puzzle. Will your magazine be published without a puzzle? I'm supplying one." Saying this he wrote down the following puzzle.

### The Puzzle

Waking up, Habuchandra summoned Gabuchandra, "Counsellor, oh counsellor! See! The sun is rising in the west." The counsellor thought that perhaps the king was dreaming in his sleep. So he turned to the other side and went on snoring. The king called again, "See! What a surprise! The sun is rising in the west." Thus the king called him thrice, and then the counsellor came and said, "Maharaja, you seem to be delirious." The king said, "Don't you believe me? But look at this!" At that moment the clock struck six. Gabuchandra began to muse, "How could this strange thing happen?"

I had copied the conundrum and then asked, "What is its solution?"

Dadamashai replied, "We won't give it now. Let them think and ponder." Then he asked for an envelope, wrote the answer on a piece of paper and closed the envelope with gum. "Open it at the end of the month," he said. "Now put it in your desk."

No one could suggest the correct answer. At last tearing the envelope open, we saw the solution which was like this:

On the western wall of King Habuchandra's room there hung a huge mirror from the time of his grandfather.

Many had refused to accept this solution of the puzzle. They contended that if such a mirror was hung in his room, sunrise would be seen in the west every day. Why then had Habuchandra come to speak of it only that day?

Dadamashai replied promptly, "This is so because he is Habuchandra and none else. Or, how could it happen?"

Our *Deyala* continued to be published with enthusiasm. We received excellent stories and poems from our Dadamashai and father. Those compositions were later published in *Mouchak* (beehive). Father's story '*Paramparya*' (Tradition) was first published in *Deyala*. Dadamashai's '*Sahaj Chitreshiksha*' (Easy Learning of Drawing) was published serially with sketches drawn by him. Sometimes Dadamashai would edit our compositions but never corrected our errors. He wanted us to write without fear.

Dadamashai encouraged and supported us in such a way that we went on writing boldly. We did not bother about the final outcome. Only once had he penned through a poem written by Gabanama and written it himself. That poem, however, was not published anywhere.

There, where the wintry wind sharply blew,  
 Stirring the old Tamal tree and its branches few;  
 On the floor of the forest eventide descended,  
 While I dreamt, the day waned and the sun relented.  
 Yonder rocked the sea of light beyond the blue sky  
 On the lap of the garden of the gilded palace, aye!  
 I would float my boat and on a search embark  
 Yet, I remember not for whom, my mind is so dark.  
 My heart sought him on a glowing evening  
 Whom I have lost, and swam toward, amidst light brimming.

Poems, stories, articles and conundrums – all rushed through our pens. We could do this only because we had Dadamashai's assurance – "Go on writing boldly."

At that time Aruda used to come to the southern veranda every day. Dadamashai said, "Collect a story from Aruda for your magazine. He has a stock of very good stories!"

We pressed Aruda for a story. But he just sat quietly and never attempted to write a single line. We would not let him go. We went on saying, "We didn't get the composition today, but we must have it tomorrow."

One day coming in the morning Aruda said abruptly, "Now come and take it down. I now remember a fine rhymed verse. It fits your magazine. It's a song of the beard."

I took it down –  
 Beard pointed and dense beard  
 Pleasing to the eye, beautiful beard;  
 Family pedigree indisputable  
 That beard is the most reputable.  
 Some beards show dignity and charm  
 While others are chaste and bring no harm.  
 Some beards are experts beyond reprehension

And yet some cause apprehension.<sup>2</sup>

Dadamashai who was sitting nearby said, "Bring it to me. Let me see it. Aruda has at last produced something out of his stock."

Saying this he wrote a fine story based on Aruda's song of the beard, and it became material for our *Deyala*. This famous story of Dadamashai's was later published in *Mouchak* and *Ake Tin Tine Ak* under the title '*Kanchaye Pakay*'.

After this we were also able to make Aruda write a complete story for *Deyala*. The story entitled '*Firni Khaaar Galpo*' (The Story of Tasting Firni) was published in *Rang Mahal*. That was the only short story written by Aruda.

We also pleaded to our Bardadamashai to contribute paintings to *Deyala*. In china ink he had painted pictures with a swift hand and gave them to me. Those paintings were so beautiful that we did not feel like spoiling them by fixing them with gum to our poor magazine.

We stored them and planned how those could be presented in *Deyala*. Then we decided that if we could ever publish *Deyala* in print, the paintings could see the light of day and so we kept them stored.

To Bardadamashai we said, "Better you write a story for us-- that may be published handwritten in *Deyala*."

He said, "I don't know how to write stories. That's Aban's business."

"That won't do," we said. "Aruda has written a story -- we must have one from you."

Our enthusiasm was very great then. We resolved to make everybody write something for *Deyala*.

We had so much enthusiasm in the beginning. However, within a

2 This is a piece of nonsense verse and cannot be translated. The original is given below in Roman alphabet.

AB DARHI CHAP DARHI  
 BULBUL CHASMEDAR DARHI  
 KUL PUKKA EK KANCHHA  
 SABSE DARHI OHI ACCHA  
 EK DARHI MAN MONOHAR  
 EK DARHI BAABBO  
 EK DARHI KHALIF FAJIHAT  
 EK DARHI THACHCHO!

etc. etc.

year we lost our zeal to publish the handwritten magazine. And when the half-copied last issue was lying with us and we had no hope of any further contribution, we received an excellent composition from Bardadamashai named '*Deyala of Dadabhai*'<sup>3</sup>.

Unfortunately this could not be published in *Deyala*. Later it was printed first in the autumn issue of *Basumatî* and afterwards as a book entitled *Bhondor Bahadur* from the Signet Press.

Like Aruda's, this was the only story written by our Bardadamashai. Both were produced while their authors were frolicking with children like us.

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<sup>3</sup> *Dadabhai* – grandson

## *Chapter 7*

“Don’t forget to take the telescope. See where it is!”

The age-old telescope was in a leather case, lying in dust behind the row of books in the shelf of old books. Dadamashai got busy in cleaning the telescope.

This was to be taken to Darjeeling. Preparations were being made to go to Darjeeling. Dadamashai picked and chose this and that. He had gathered colours, brushes, papers, boards, sticks and that telescope.

“The eye stretches to a point quite far off in the hills. One cannot do without a telescope.”

Quite a lot of baggage had to be taken along. Therefore, a few days passed by just to arrange them. Huge rolls of bedding were covered with a blue-striped carpet and bound. Crockeries were carried in potbellied wooden chests. Trunks of tin and leather were full of woolen garments, shoes, stockings and vests while baskets were full of snacks to be taken on the road.

The day our journey began Dadamashai was ready before everyone else. About three hours before our journey was scheduled to start, he changed his dress and with a stick in hand and a cheroot in his mouth, he was asking everyone to hurry up.

Didima said, “Yours is a queer way indeed! Why should we go so much before time?”

Dadamashai tried to explain, “Would we gain by staying here? It is much better to go to the station and wait there.”

He would feel relieved once the journey started. I’ve seen it happening frequently. Once, Dadamashai was to go to a meeting at the Indian Society. The meeting was to begin at six, but he was ready at three and the driver Misir was ordered to bring the car.

“Now I feel well. It is better to start now. I may not feel like this later.”

In the train he pushed us to wakefulness at dawn. The train ran northwards. We were yet to reach Siliguri. The ice-capped Himalayan peaks stretched against the bosom of the blue sky from east to west. Dadamashai said, “See it, just see! See how the God Mahadev rests

with his nose pointing upwards."

Had we ever seen such a picture painted in light white against the canvas of the morning sky? We looked agape in wonder. By then Dadamashai raised quite an uproar inside the train compartment. "Where is the telescope? In which box? It's not found anywhere. Is it lost? Have we left it at home?"

Dadamashai became crestfallen. "Such an old telescope is gone at last," said he. "It seems our journey to Darjeeling this time will be a failure."

Hearing all this, Didima said, "Why should it be lost? It is packed up inside the big bedding."

The big bedding meant a huge affair. It contained cushions, mattresses, pillows, quilts and blankets on the one hand, and shoes, sticks, our playthings and books on the other. It was bound with a rope on all sides in such a way that it was impossible to open it inside the railway compartment.

Dadamashai heard Didima's words. He said, "Oh, then it's all right. I was much worried." Afterwards looking towards us, he said, "I thought I would at once bring Kanchanjangha near you. But your fate seems to have willed otherwise."

We were still watching with enchantment the Kanchanjangha at a distance.

Going up on the hill we were lacking in agility in the bone-shivering cold of Darjeeling. By day we would be sitting under the sun and at night we would be raising a fire of wood – sit round it and gossip together. And once we got under the quilt, we would not easily come out of it. Maid Haridasi would warm herself up in the next room. She would shiver and go on murmuring in a monotonous tune, "Oh dear! Where have they brought me? They seem to have liked this country, so they do not even speak of going from here. When will they go back?" We would hear her lamentation and break into laughter.

Like the rest, I too woke up quite late in the morning. Before sunrise I would not leave the bed. One day, rather capriciously, I woke up at dawn. It was still dark, and in the house no one had gotten up yet. A curtain of fog shrouded the outside world. After a wash and wearing warm clothes, when I went to the glass-covered wooden veranda, I heard the noise of heavy footsteps and saw

Dadamashai enter the veranda from the other side.

He was glad to see me. "So you have gotten up! It is most enjoyable here at dawn. Let me show you. But take something before that."

I understood that Dadamashai's habit was to wake up at dawn. I said, "What shall I eat? Who will give me food so early in the morning?"

Dada said, "Come with me." He took me into the dining room. I knew that there used to be eatables in the net-covered almirahs, but we were forbidden to touch them. Dadamashai opened the netted door of an almirah and brought out a huge cake.

I knew that each of us deserved to have just a small slice at half past eight. Showing the knife he asked me to cut two big pieces. As I hesitated he rejoined, "You need not fear — cut it. First come, first served. Let us put the slices in our mouth and go out."

I was then floating in enthusiasm. Dadamashai and grandson went out with two quite fat pieces of cake in hand. The taste of cake seemed so good on that day. I felt that I had never tasted such a fine cake in my whole life.

Coming out of the house we two walked through the shade of trees. It was quite cold. Dadamashai had worn a long Tibetan *boku* that covered his legs and a velvet cap. I had an oversized overcoat on me. Shrinking in the cold I walked with my hands in its pockets. But the touch of the cool breeze on my face seemed really nice. Going some distance along a circuitous route, Dadamashai stopped. There was an opening in the dense trees. Through it the peak of Kanchanjangha could be seen. It looked like a framed picture. The colour of ice was still pale like that of a corpse.

Dadamashai said, "It will be animated in a trice. See! Something stupendous will happen. You stand here. Let me sit for a while." Saying this, he sat on an uprooted pine tree and lit a Burma cheroot brought out of the pocket of his *boku*.

Carried by the wind, the morning fog was receding before our eyes. Soon after, from somewhere, light descended on the snowcapped peak. Then, every moment, the appearance of the snow and the sky was changing. The earth was waking up. Waves of colour and light drifted around us. And that static picture of Kanchanjangha in a frame of plants and trees began to prattle. We

enjoyed that ecstatic beauty quietly for a long time till the sun rose to some height in the sky.

Dadamashai said, "This doesn't happen every day. It is difficult to get a view when there is fog." We went back home after wandering joyously here and there a little more. By that time the rest of the household began to stir. The smell of fried eggs was coming from the kitchen. Winking at me, Dadamashai said, "Shall we have some more?" I knew that he was hinting at the cake.

From that day onwards, almost every day I used to be Dadamashai's companion in the first phase of his morning walk.

Dadamashai did his second phase of walking after breakfast. It was expected that when such a great artist went to Darjeeling, he should enjoy the grand beauty of the forest and the mountain and the soothing sight of the drifting clouds and hear the sweet songs of the birds. On the contrary, my Dadamashai used to wander among the markets and lanes — see the shops and hutments of the hill tribes and sometimes talk with them. Mostly he wandered among the people's dwellings. One day while wandering in this way he was going from the market up to the mall when he noticed a scuffle going on in front of him. A Bhutia girl placed her wares of peanuts on the roadside. Two or three European boys turned the basket upside down scattering the nuts everywhere and the Bhutia girl couldn't fend off the boys.

Dadamashai had to be seen then! With his stick raised, he rushed towards them. The boys were quite obstinate. They fled but aggressively came back. That was during the period of the British rule. They might have been the wards of some important persons. A peon was with them and he was more aggressive than the boys. They might have been the sons of a governor or a minister, but they took to their heels seeing Dadamashai's raised stick. The Bhutia girl too gathered her nuts.

Next day when Dadamashai went to the mall, the peanut-seller offered him a packet of nuts. Dadamashai said, "What shall I do with peanuts?" Still she insisted and asked him to take them. "I can't digest the nuts. Keep it for yourself." Saying this, he moved along. From then on whenever Dadamashai went to the mall, that Bhutia girl tried to give him a packet of nuts.

We heard from Dadamashai what happened afterwards when he

went to visit the Kurseung hills. One day he went to Darjeeling from Kurseung and while visiting the mall, he saw the Bhutia girl running towards him with a packet of nuts in her hand. She was no longer a small girl but was quite grown up. She brought her father along with her to meet Dadamashai. She was so glad to see her benevolent friend. Dadamashai returned her nuts a number of times, but this time he had to take them. On returning to Kurseung he told us the story and commented in his characteristic way, "She, being a nut-seller, knew me well."<sup>1</sup>

Coming back from his morning walk Dadamashai painted pictures or viewed things around through the telescope. A bamboo pillar was fixed on the ground in front of the house and a stand was made on which to place the telescope. While he moved the telescope around, the mountain range could be seen from one end to the other. At midday after lunch he also continued painting pictures or seeing through the telescope. He also allowed us to see through the telescope. Sometimes, Dadamashai would sit for hours with the telescope in his hand.

There was a small village on a distant hill with a small slum consisting of a few huts. Small children of the village took the goats and the geese to graze. It was a quiet village at midday. Menfolk of the village would leave for their chores. Children might hide themselves somewhere, leaving no trace at all. It was all quiet. Suddenly the doors of a hut opened. A highland mother came out and shouted, summoning someone. Nothing could be heard through the telescope, but a boy and a girl were seen frisking towards their home and leading a flock of geese. The mother had a small wicker basket in her hand. She brought out a handful of food from her basket and gave them to the boy and the girl. They began to eat, sitting on the doorstop. The geese moved to and fro round the hut. However, none of these could be seen with the plain eye, but through the telescope Dadamashai used to see things as in a bioscope.

One day at noon suddenly we heard Dadamashai shouting, "Come and see. Come and see. Where is Mohanlal – call him."

Reading books or enjoying a semi-sleep, we had been in the glass-room. At once I rushed out of the room.

<sup>1</sup> There is a pun in the two Bengali words 'Chinabadam' (nuts) and 'China/Chena' (to recognize). The sounds are alike, but their spellings and meanings are different.

Dadamashai said, "Align your eyes properly with the eyepiece. Verily, this is Uncle Rabi's *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga* (Awakening of the Dream Fountain)."

Putting my eye to the telescope, I saw there was only ice on ice. Dadamashai asked impatiently, "Don't you see?"

"I see only ice," I replied.

"Let me see. Don't move the telescope." With these words he put his eye on it.

"See, there is a small fountain, the water dropping very mildly."

Then we all looked carefully, one after another, and saw clearly a faraway fountain at the foot of the Himalayas.

Dadamashai said, "I was viewing the mountain scenes, moving the telescope towards the ice and suddenly I saw something moving. I thought it might be a huge animal. Then I saw a huge slice of ice falling and at once a rivulet flowed out of it. All this was seen from a great distance. It must be something tremendous – who knows what is happening there! It really looks like your Great Dadamashai's *Nirjharer Swapnabhanga*."

Dadamashai added, "We are lucky to have brought the telescope."

Many a visitor brings a telescope with him. But whoever has had the good fortune of seeing through it how a rivulet pushes through, breaking the ice-wall of the Himalayas?

From then on, our Dadamashai would see that fountain, time and again, through the telescope.

## Chapter 8

Dadamashai used to say very often that the best stories are those of the Arabian tales. Such tales were never written in any literature. He often read the Arabian tales. He bought fat volumes of the illustrated *Arabian Nights* by Burton, three volumes of Ramananda Chattopadhyaya's *Arabian Tales* and several Bengali versions of the Arabian Nights of Grub Street. Besides, he used to buy from the Urdu bookshops stories of the Arabian tales written in Urdu.

It was the well-known story of Alibaba – how Kasim entered the cave of the bandits and how he was entrapped there, forgetting the incantation of 'Open Sesame' and got caught in the hands of the bandits. They chopped his body into four and hanged it on the wall of the cave. Alibaba returned to Bagdad carrying several parts of Kasim's body and managed to make a tailor sew them together.

Dadamashai was painting a picture of this tailor. This was one of the many pictures he was painting at the time. He was painting it again and again but none was to his liking. He would grumble mildly over a trifling defect. Putting off the brush he looked at the picture from different angles, yet could not guess where the fault lay. He would often show a picture to us and ask, "See, can you tell me where the fault lies in this picture?" We did not know what to say. It seemed quite perfect and we found no fault in it.

At that time Prasanta Roy used to sit by Dadamashai's table almost every day and watch him painting. Prasantababu was not such a great artist then as he is now. His apprenticeship had just begun. It meant sitting by Dadamashai and watching him paint for hours together. Whatever he learnt was learnt in this way. That was how Dadamashai would teach. "Nothing can be taught by force," he said. "One has to learn by oneself!"

He would ask Prasantababu, "See, there seems to be some fault here." And he would point to a particular spot at the bottom of the picture. Above it, through the open door, could be seen an old tailor sewing with very fine stitches. Below were three bandits consulting among themselves. They came to Bagdad to kill the man who stole Kasim's dead body. Prasantababu replied, "It seems all right. There is

no fault at all!"

Still Dadamashai would remain fretful. He continued to paint, but he was not happy.

Thus two days passed. He was putting several layers of colour on the picture and it was nearly finished. That evening Radhu came with Dadamashai's sherbet. Putting the picture upside down, he showed it to Radhu and said, "I've been painting this picture for several days, but the thing is not up to my satisfaction. Something must have gone wrong here, in this part. See if you can find it out."

Radhu was not an apprentice, nor did he persevere to learn the art of painting. He had nothing to fear and, without any hesitation, replied, "It seems something has gone wrong in these three men down there."

Dadamashai jumped up. "You have caught it right." Saying this he took hold of the stone glass and gulped down the sherbet.

"Have you noticed, Prasanta, that Radhu has eyes? All the trouble is with these three men!"

Thus the problem was solved.

Prasantababu was dumb-founded. The three men were perfectly painted at the bottom; their colouring was all done. Now he said that those three bandits were at the root of all trouble!

Radhu left when the glass of sherbet was emptied. Painting stopped for the day as the light was fading.

Next day Prasantababu came as usual and sat by Dadamashai's table to watch him paint. But he could not recognize the picture as those three men had completely disappeared. There was no trace of them. Dadamashai seemed very happy. "Now look at the picture," he said. "The fault has been removed. Radhu was right enough. Those three men were the root of the trouble and I have wiped them out."

The pictures of the Arabian tales were then being painted in full swing. It took five or six days to paint a picture. But the first one where Shahzadi was telling a story to the Badshah seemed to have no end. It took more than twenty days to complete that picture. Dadamashai had rubbed the picture in such a way that when dipped in water, it looked like a piece of blotting paper. The painting would be sunk into water once, and Prasantababu would tremble in fear that it might be torn. But when dried, it would be quite crisp again.

In this way began the painting of pictures for the series of Arabian tales. Jasimuddin came one day when several pictures were already

painted. Dadamashai had in his hand paper, colours and a brush. He said, "See, Jasim, I'm painting the picture of your Alif Layla-Oya-Layla."

Jasimuddin didn't understand anything. Dadamashai said, "Nay, he is a Muslim by name only. You seem not to know Urdu at all. It's only the Arabian tales. Have you heard of Ramananda Chattopadhaya's *Arabian Tales*?"

By then Jasimuddin began to watch with rapt attention the pictures already painted, while turning them upside down. As he looked at them he was overwhelmed with emotion and asked us, "When did he begin to paint these pictures?"

Since he began to visit our house, Jasimuddin never saw Dadamashai paint pictures. At that time Dadamashai did not paint for some reason or the other. He wrote but did not use the brush. Having discontinued for a long time, he began to paint anew a series of pictures of the Arabian tales – and once begun, it flowed incessantly. Besides, these pictures were completely of a new category. Never before had he drawn pictures in this manner.

Jasimuddin asked, "Dadamashai, how many more of such pictures will you paint?"

"I shall paint them all. Do you think I will leave off any of the Arabian tales? Just as more than a thousand nights were filled with stories, so shall I cover them with pictures."

Jasimuddin asked, "Will you be able to paint so many?"

"I must. What do you think of me? Just see how I do it."

"You could have done it had you started earlier. Have you considered how many years will be required to paint all these pictures? All of the Arabian tales?"

"What does it matter if it requires a long time? Do you think my hands will be atrophied? This is just the beginning. I have yet to do the pictures of Aladdin, Abu Hossein, Harun-al-Rashid – then the story of four fishes, the flying carpet and Sindbad the sailor. There is a story of three apples, then one of three sisters. Have you read the story of the Chinese princess? There is also a tale of nine dolls. Your face betrays that you haven't ever heard their names even!"

Jasimuddin said, "How long will it take to paint one of these? How many years will you need to paint a thousand such pictures? Will it be possible in a single life?"

Dadamashai lifted his brush and, looking at Jasimuddin, said, "It seems that you do not even know that an artist does not take time into account when he paints a picture. With the colours in his hand he visualizes that there lies before him an eternal time and endless life – that will never come to an end. This brush and the colours too will never be exhausted. You write poems. Go, persevere and practise – be committed to your own art."

Dadamashai painted thirty-seven pictures of the Arabian tales in all. But they were equal to a thousand pictures and one.

## *Chapter 9*

‘Inexhaustible quiver’ – this Dadamashai used to call his colour-box. We had wondered seeing in our childhood that Dadamashai painted so many pictures, yet his colours were never exhausted. But how quickly we used up the cake-shaped colours that used to come for us from Chandni! We would mix them in water or pierce them with a pointed brush and finish them off. Often Dadamashai received from people gifts such as colour-boxes and caskets containing broad-mouthed glass bottles full of colours. Those he used to put by unused. Only rarely did he bring them out for use. He liked to paint pictures from the old colour-box. We really believed it to be an inexhaustible quiver. Its colours were never depleted.

One day a boy visited Dadamashai. Although unknown, he came straight to the southern verandah. He had a bunch of papers under his arm and a greasy bag hanging from his shoulder. He stooped and touching Dadamashai’s feet in obeisance said, “I’ve come to you to learn painting!”

Those of us who were present there felt that Dadamashai took offence. He never liked such forward behaviour and people who asserted themselves thus ostentatiously.

Drawing his feet in and looking obliquely at him through the spectacles, Dadamashai asked, “Who are you?”

Restraining himself on hearing the tone of Dadamashai’s voice, the boy said, “Sir, I’ve come to you because I’ve a great desire to learn how to paint. I’ve done some practice on my own.”

Dadamashai replied, “If you be so intent on it, you could go to the art school. Why have you come here?”

The boy found that he was not received as well as he had expected. Softening his tone, he said, “If you see my paintings, you may...I’ve come only to you to learn.”

Although annoyed, Dadamashai was quite eager to see the paintings – whatever be their quality. “Let me see the pictures you have brought. Bring them out of your bag!”

The boy didn’t bring any pictures at all. In his bag he only had colours and brushes. He had paper with him, and he wanted to paint

in front of Dadamashai. He would show his excellence to the master artist.

Dadamashai said, "I do understand now." Then he said to us, "Put that chair aside," and he asked the boy to paint while he himself went to wander about.

The boy was made to sit on the floor to the south of the veranda near the railing. He was given a basin full of water. He began to paint at once, laying his paper on the floor.

Dadamashai arose and went to the garden, taking us along with him. "Come, let him paint alone. Don't make a noise."

He did not show any interest at all to know how his new disciple was and how he painted. Sitting on a bench in the garden he lit a Burmese cheroot. Lingering there for some time, he finished the cheroot and then left the garden. We followed him. Reaching the veranda we saw the picture was done and the boy seemed quite happy. Two or three packets of paints were lying on the floor and coloured water oozed from them. Particles of paints were sprinkled all over the railing and the pillars. There were colours everywhere — on his shirt, sleeves and fingers. Dadamashai's basin full of clear water was turned into a medley of dark brown and green. It was quite evident that the young artist, in his exuberant zeal, showered the excess of paints as well as his ardour everywhere about him, thereby upsetting everything. The picture was not that bad, but Dadamashai's face still appeared sombre.

He said rather rudely, "You have done enough and need not paint any further. It doesn't befit one to handle a brush who knows not the value of colours. Take this piece of cloth, cleanse my veranda and go back home."

He threw at him a piece of cloth with which he used to clean the glass of the microscope. He did not even look at the picture once.

With an abashed face the boy cleansed the veranda, gathered his abundance of paints and stood up to leave the place.

Dadamashai said, "Come to me only when you're aware of the value of colours!"

The boy never came again. At least I never saw him. None of us knew his name nor did we know if he, later in life, realized the value of colours or if he became a great artist without ever waiting to know the value of colours.

The very precious pictures that Dadamashai painted with scanty colours were considered as purely Indian pictures. In the beginning of his career as an artist, he had learnt to paint in the European style, but all that he had given up long ago. When everyone spoke of the non-cooperative movement of Mahatma Gandhi, many had been giving up the foreign clothes and smoking *bidis*<sup>1</sup> instead of cigarettes. At that time Dadamashai said, "I don't smoke cigarettes – I take only Burmese cheroots and tobacco perfumed with ambergris. Both of these are purely native products. But, if you ask me to wear *khadi*<sup>2</sup> cloth, giving up trousers and shirts made of foreign cloth I won't be able to do it. Such clothes will be prickly on my body. I'd rather sacrifice my foreign colour-box and paint with indigenously-made colours."

Thereby he ordered Kshitish to bring as many of the powdered colours as available from the shop at the corner of the main street. Addressing us he said, "Come – I'll teach you how to make native colours." Kshitish brought red ochre and ink made of soot and catechu. These may be purely native things. Some other colours that he brought from the shop, such as orange, red, blue, green and yellow, came out of German and European packets. However, in our enthusiasm to make native colours, we did not notice these small things. That they came from the local Bengali shop was enough to call them native.

We began to produce colours. All of us, the young ones, came to be involved in this native factory. Dadamashai knew how to make coloured cakes by grinding a powdered colour and mixing it with gum and glycerin. He had mixed a lot of other things too of his own concoction. In his great zeal he had prepared a colour with mud from the river Ganga and said, "Eureka! Henceforth we will not have to paint mud by mixing colours. This will serve that purpose by blending with water."

Some of these colours were really excellent and he had drawn many pictures with them. The colour blue became wonderfully successful. It lasted a long time and Dadamashai used it scantily. He called it the 'blue tablet' and said, "It is like the real blue of the indigo

<sup>1</sup> *bidi* – a kind of slender cigarette rolled in a dry leaf

<sup>2</sup> *khadi* – homespun cotton cloth worn by adherents of the movement for autonomy in India instead of the mill-made foreign product

planters. You won't find such a colour in a European box."

At that time he had painted with the colour of mud from the Ganges. Some of those pictures are still with us. He had offered the picture of hilly huts painted with the 'blue tablet' to Charudidi; that colour had a wonderful effect. Whenever I had been to Charudidi's house, I saw that the colour had been brightening with the passage of time. This culture and practice of colour continued for some time. Many native colours were devised for painting alone, but also used for dying cloth. At that time was published a book by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray entitled *Native Colour*, and Dadamashai gathered information from that book too. Once he had coloured a piece of cloth in deep red for our Didima. Strangely enough, when it was returned from the washerman's, it turned into sparkling yellow and that was a great source of laughter.

We used to mould human figures, birds, dolls and toys with European plasticine available in the market. When our plasticine was used up, Gupibabu brought it new from the market. But with the days of abandonment of foreign goods, no one could ask for foreign colourful plasticine. No doubt we were fond of playing with colourful plasticine, but our play-world was not darkened without it. Dadamashai was shocked at heart. He said, "Come – I'll make native plasticine for you. Go, Kshitish! Bring good wax and colours from the nearby shop."

Kshitish came back with the precious wax. It was melted and, for several days, Dadamashai was engaged in making experiments by mixing it with this and that. At last he had managed to produce some kind of native plasticine. "I could mix only black soot with it, no other colour." Saying this he gave us a large lump of plasticine. "Take this and play with it." That plasticine, however, was not to our liking, perhaps because of its black colour or for some other reason. For a few days we played with it and then left it off. Dadamashai then began to make toys of different kinds with that plasticine of his own making. Thus he had created a few wonderful things which would be better preserved for the future. Woven toys do not last long if they are uncared for. So Haricharan the workman was called. Haricharan could mould anything, but it was very difficult to cast waxen materials in brass. A little excess of heat or pressure would spoil the shape of things. For a few days they had consulted together.

Finally, they had invented a process by which very soft wax toys could be moulded into brass.

Dadamashai said, "Haricharan, let this be your patent. Don't teach it to any one."

We don't know if that secret process is still maintained in Haricharan's family through his descendants, but some of Dadamashai's perfect creations in wax made at that time are still preserved in brass.

At that time fruits of the myrtle creeper split, scattering their wool all over the garden. We ran to catch hold of the wool. Seeing that, Dadamashai said, "Bring a bunch of wool. Let me see if I can make a native brush out of it." We climbed the myrtle, split the dried fruit and brought a handful of feather-like soft wool. He bound them with cotton and made a few thin brushes. Handles were made cutting the stems of China bamboo. Then he put the bottom of the brush on the handle and joined them with the gum of tamarisk tree and lac. Thus were prepared some brilliantly white brushes.

But, when dipped in water and then put in the colours, it seemed that the myrtle's wool was as soft as its flower. It drooped when the wet brush was put in colour. It was then impossible to draw even a line as no colour touched the top of the brush. The wool became totally drenched in water. Dadamashai tried several times, and then gave up, saying, "If there were squirrels in the garden, I could have made brushes by severing their tails. But they are not here. At least I've learnt a lesson that plant-wool cannot be made into a drawing brush."

## *Chapter 10*

Thereupon we had a discussion with Dadamashai as to whether the brush was the most important instrument for painting. If the process of making the brush with animal's hair was not invented, we could never have artists. That meant Dadamashai could not be so famous.

"Had there been no brush, we would have painted with the pen and written with the pencil," Dadamashai replied.

We wouldn't accept defeat and therefore argued, "What would have happened had there been no pen or pencil?"

"I would have painted with silt then."

"If there were no silt?"

"Then this or that would have served the purpose." Thus we went on arguing for some time.

At last when everything, even the possibility of using the twigs of trees or birds' feathers as drawing implements had been exhausted, Dadamashai said, showing the fingers of his right hand, "Even if there were none of these, I would still have continued to draw with my fingers. The art of drawing would not have stopped. Something would have prompted me from within. My fingers would have tingled. As the hands were created, so pictures must have been created. It is not that the implement came first and then the operator – the hands first and then the tools!"

The day before, the gardeners had burnt the branches and twigs of trees. "Bring a few burnt-off sticks and I will show you what to do."

We came back with a few half-burnt pieces of charcoal. With these Dadamashai drew a beautiful picture on a small piece of paper.

We all appreciated the picture. But it was charcoal after all. How long will the lines last, we pondered. The lines will be effaced in no time and no one will even know the artist's name.

Dadamashai said, "Wait, wait. Let me just finish it." Then he dipped the paper in water. Half of the picture was washed away. Then, holding it up to dry, he began to rub his finger on the lines of charcoal. For some time he went on doing this: a new line of charcoal

would be drawn, and then he would rub it with his finger and put a coating of water — this continued throughout the morning. At last, completing the picture in black and white, he said, "Put it out under the sun; its colour will not be wiped out any more."

"So you see how pictures can be drawn with burnt-off wood. Had there been nothing else, firewood could also be used for this purpose. Charcoal and fixer bought from the nearby shop could also be used for this purpose. Let me show you."

Saying this he pulled out of his drawer a piece of very old charcoal and began to paint the face of one of us. Laying the two pictures side by side he asked, "Do you notice any difference between the two pictures?"

We said, "The previous one seems better."

Dadamashai said, "It has to be so. It has been rubbed a lot by the fingers. Nothing is like the fingers."

At that time he had painted several pictures with the charcoal that he picked out of the old box. Dadamashai had shown us paintings done by charcoal, chalk, red ochre and by whatever he had an easy access to. Once he had painted a picture with a toothbrush. But no one could imagine that it was not painted with a brush from G. C. Laha's shop. He said, "This one is a brush and that too. In an artist's hand all are the same."

Then, after a long time Dadamashai began to draw a portrait once again. This was the first occasion when we saw him draw portraits. Before we were born he had painted some famous portraits including those of Maharshi Debendranath, Dwijendranath and Rabindranath. There was also a childhood portrait of our maternal uncle, for which he had been awarded a prize in a Parisian exhibition. This time he had drawn portraits of everyone in the family. Among these were relatives, students, associates, friends and even the servant Radhu.

While painting portraits one day he declared, "Always looking at men's faces, now I only see masks. In fact, beneath the facial skin of every person there is a mask. Those masks always come to my view now that it reflects a man's real image." Saying this, Dadamashai began to draw various kinds of masks. Very soon about sixty to seventy masks were done. At that time a drama of our Kattababa was being enacted. Perhaps it was *Tapati*. Dadamashai painted about ten masks on its characters.

A letter arrived from our Kattababa stating that a European artist came to Santiniketan who had painted portraits of many great and famous men such as Einstein. At Santiniketan he had painted portraits of Kattababa, Nandada and many others. Now he was eager to go to Jorasanko, meet our Dadamashai and paint their portraits.

After we heard about the sahib's arrival, chairs and tables were arranged in rows and the cornice was swept clean. Nothing special was done for his reception. Whoever came, be he a sahib or somebody else, would be brought to this veranda, where he was to take his seat. Everyone had their place there. There was a well-decorated library room in the house, but our Dadamashai did not generally receive their guests there. We heard that long before our birth, Dadamashai used to prattle and gossip in that room. Once Chinese artists, Japanese artists and governors were cordially received in that room, but later the library room was left unused. Only because the room was cool our three Dadamashai used it for a siesta in summer afternoons. Otherwise they never entered it.

The sahib arrived. He seemed very agile. After the initial acquaintance he pulled out paper and thick pencils from his bag and began to paint portraits. The sahib said, "You just sit as before and do whatever you had been doing. You need not worry, nor take any pose. I am making sketches."

The three Dadamashais were sitting as usual in the veranda facing southwards. First was our eldest Dadamashai engaged in painting; next sat Dadamashai (the youngest) who was also painting a picture. And then in the eastern corner of the veranda, close to the round staircase, was sitting our second Dadamashai (Mejdadamashai) reading a book. There was a wooden, round staircase to the eastern corner of the veranda through which only the inmates of the house could move about. In the morning our Bardadamashai used to come down to the second floor from the third, while Dadamashai came down to the garden from the second floor. We played hide-and-seek.

After nightfall when the staircase was engulfed in pitch-darkness, we never dared to go to that side.

The first to be painted was the portrait of our Bardadamashai. He was not at all aware when the drawing was finished. It was really lively. Bardadamashai put his signature at the bottom of the portrait.

Next the sahib went to Mejdadamashai. Briskly he went on

painting and finished the portrait. It was an exact representation of Mejdadamashai's face, and he too signed on it.

Then it was Dadamashai's turn. With bent head and a pipe to his mouth, he was absorbed in painting. As the sahib stood before him, putting aside his painting and removing his pipe, Dadamashai was going to sit straight, when the sahib said, "Mr. Tagore, don't worry. Please, go on painting as before."

Dadamashai had just dipped the picture in water. He put it aside to dry it out. Then putting out another paper he began to draw intently. With the silver tube of the pipe put to his mouth and puffing tobacco, Dadamashai continued painting. One of Dadamashai's teeth of the upper or lower jaw, I am not sure which, was partly broken. The tube was perfectly set into that broken portion. Many a time it so happened that the tobacco was burnt off and the fire extinguished, but Dadamashai was still pressing the pipe and puffing it. He did not put it aside. Water inside the bubble-bubble was generating the bubbling sound, but he was not aware of it.

Soon afterwards, the sahib, completing his portrait, putting it forth and handing over his charcoal pencil to Dadamashai, said, "Would you please sign your name, Mr. Tagore?"

Dadamashai replied, "Certainly, I will. But, sahib, you too will please sign yours." Saying this he put forward the paper he was carrying in his lap. It contained a mask of the sahib.

The sahib was overwhelmed with amazement. He was a man of great reputation and it was thought that no one could sketch as fast as he did. Did he come to have a rival now, he thought.

"How could you do it, Mr. Tagore? You didn't look at my face more than once. When did you do it? Besides, this is a wonderful portrait. We could not even think that a portrait can be painted in this style."

Smiling with the pipe in his mouth, Dadamashai said, "Sahib, when you had been doing the sketch, I also managed to paint this picture. I call it a 'mask'. It is, however, not a mask of the outer appearance but of the inner man. What do you think of it, sahib?"

Flabbergasted, the sahib said, "This is priceless." With these words he left, taking one picture in lieu of another.

## Chapter 11

While deciding to make salt at Dandi, Gandhiji drew the whole country towards the non-cooperation movement. I, too, inspired by the love for the nation and with a view to making salt, left the Jorasanko House secretly on a summer afternoon and told no one about this. There was an office of the Provincial Congress Committee at College Square. That came to be a camp for the self-appointed volunteers of the party who made illegal salt. With a coarse *khadi* and a black *punjabi*<sup>1</sup> on and hanging a cloth-bag on my shoulder, I went to the Congress office. I said, "Now please send me to make salt." I was told that I might join a group which was going to Midnapore, but I would have to wait now. A news bulletin was being printed in the next room by revolving the duplicator. I went there and sat by them, seeking to help them.

Suddenly I saw Nandada. I knew that he had a secret connection with the Congress. But I could not even think that I would meet Nandada at such a forbidden place. The funny thing was that it was not clear whether I was spotted by Nandada or he spotted me. Nandada used to feel intimidated by Dadamashai, while Dadamashai was scared of these movements of the Congress, extensive arrests, the police, court, jail, bullets and guns. Nandada was just a boy to him, and to go ahead and face these dangerous events was the act of an imprudent child. Nandada was thinking that if I would inform Babamashai on returning home, then that would be a disaster whereas I felt afraid to think that if he told Dadamashai about this, he would come here at once and take me back.

Both of us were guilty. Therefore, we somehow made a silent compromise between us. We mumbled hum and haw and quickly went to two different rooms. Even today, I do not know why Nandada went there, nor did Nandada ask me what was my business there. However, I noticed that not only Nandada but Prabhat Mohan Bandopadhyay of Santiniketan, wearing a coarse *khadi* dress, was also moving about the place. Showing no eagerness to know what

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<sup>1</sup> *punjabi* – a kind of loose shirt

purpose led him there, I devoted myself to my own work. Sometime after that police shut down the Congress office.

Meanwhile an incident occurred at home. The small letter that I left with the information that I was going to make salt fell in the hands of Dadamashai. I did not say where I was going and didn't even mention the Congress office. Therefore, Dadamashai could not decide what to do. He was perplexed. Only Sujan knew about my secret adventure. It was with Sujan that I talked secretly about the freedom movement, forbidden bulletins, banned books and newspapers. Sujan did not divulge it to anyone. Dadamashai rang our lawyer.

The problems my three Dadamashais had to face were either relating to property or disease. If it is property, they would call the lawyer; and if it is an ailment, they would habitually contact a doctor. They had a strange dependence upon the family lawyer and the family doctor; it was due to Doctor Mahendra's infallible medicines that members of the household got cured of their ailments and the children were hale and hearty. Of course death is unavoidable, but that is God's unfailing dispensation. Similarly, daily meals, small living comforts and a roof for all those people were considered to be not dependent on the income from the estate, but the source of those continuing comforts of their life was thought to be sustained by the faultless arrangements and counselling of the lawyer!

A similar thing happened on another occasion. That too was related to the Congress. When the Congress conference was held in Park Circus, some of the boys including myself joined the group of singers. One day, as the rehearsal continued till late, we were delayed and reached home at 10 p.m. Seeing our delay, Mejdadamashai became apprehensive as it was a matter of the Congress. He had been repeatedly calling at the lawyer's house to know what happened to us, whether we had been put in jail or shot dead, and to seek whatever redress was possible. On our return we saw that Mejdadamashai was standing still in the dark, near the telephone. The lawyer came to be of no help, and therefore, he was utterly bewildered.

This time too the lawyer could not offer any real help. Then somebody at home advised on going to the Congress office. Dadamashai called the driver Misir and went out by car.

We had been for only about three hours in the Congress office. We had only helped in printing the forbidden bulletin which we did not find enough time to read. Just then was heard the familiar horn of a car. At once we became apprehensive. Then came the loud voice of Dadamashai. Sensing danger, Nandada ran and hid behind two pillars in a corner of the veranda. We did not notice where Prabhatbabu concealed himself. Finding no other way, I surrendered when Dadamashai reprimanded the Congress leaders with the charge that they had made a trap to kidnap children — no one dared to say anything. Then he took me to the car and left. Nandada escaped.

Coming back home, we had to wear again the coarse white linen clothes, discarding the *khadi* attire. I protested but Dadamashai would not listen to me. He said, "Enough said. Put off these garments — you will be arrested if the police see you with that black *punjabi* and bag on."

I did not dare to tell Dadamashai that my sole purpose was to get arrested by the police. Therefore, I had to cast off the black *khadi*. Then he wanted to know what was my destination.

I replied, "I was going to Tamluk."

"Why — to make salt?"

"Yes."

"A real trap has been laid by Gandhi. Entrap boys by luring them with salt. I have admonished them so much that they won't touch you any more."

"So it seems."

"Now go and play on merrily. What will you gain by making salt? Will you earn money by selling it?"

Getting thus caught and all my plans foiled, I lost the natural exuberance of my mind. Next morning I was moving about with a wan face when Dadamashai called me and asked, "Do you want to make salt?" I was puzzled by this abrupt question and could not make out what Dadamashai had in mind.

"Salt can be made at home. You need not go to Tamluk for that."

Now I understood that Dadamashai had some new plan in his mind.

"Go behind the greenhouse where Jogi, the gardener, has piled up dry coconut leaves. Take this matchbox with you and light a fire. I shall be there."

Then I recalled that once I had heard salt might be made from coconut leaves, though I did not know how it could be made.

I called Sujan, "Hurry up - salt will be made. Dadamashai is coming."

Dry coconut leaves were brushing into a blaze. When almost all the leaves were burnt off, Sujan and I began to think that police might come from the other side of the wall as we were making illegal salt. Just then Dadamashai arrived with a large bowl in his hand.

He said, "Pour the ashes in it." We filled the bowl with white ash.

"Now pour water in it."

So we did.

"Bring a worn-out *dhoti*<sup>2</sup>."

Slender wicks made of the worn-out cloth were dipped in the bowl which contained ash mixed with water and were hung loosely from the edge of the bowl. Through those wicks clear water fell drop by drop into another bowl.

Dadamashai left to take his bath. Before leaving he said, "You will see in the evening that the bowl is filled with salted water."

In fact that day we made illegal salt by drying the salted water. Because of Dadamashai's talent, we experienced the salt movement and non-cooperation in a bowl and prepared salt, but the police could not arrest us.

<sup>2</sup> *dhoti* - white loin cloth for men

## Chapter 12

Whenever some new items or specially new toys arrived in a Calcutta shop, *Bardadamashai*<sup>1</sup> would always need to buy them. Before the age of the gramophone when the phonograph appeared, Bardadamashai amused himself with that for quite a long time. He used to record, play, listen to it himself and make others listen. In our childhood, standing in front of the tube of the phonograph, we used to hear songs; and when Bardadamashai told us that there were small men inside the instrument who sang, we believed him wholeheartedly. Then, as the tiny records of the size of a phonograph tube were damaged, it was fun for us to play with them by rolling them on the ground.

One evening we heard a frightful scream from Heby on the southern veranda. We rushed there and saw Heby standing still in fear and a hellion-looking, bearded person was reclining on the easy chair stretching his legs on it. Our fear having been slightly abated, we went close and saw that it was Bardadamashai sitting with a mask on. Seeing Heby thus frightened when he put off the mask, the pleasant smiling face of Bardadamashai was exposed. Completely new masks were then available in Calcutta market and he had bought a few of those.

Riding a tricycle had become an old habit, and we had not yet been permitted to ride a bicycle when Bardadamashai brought a few scooters from somewhere. Two small wheels were attached to two ends of the plank. A handle jutted out vertically from one end of it. Holding the handle tightly, putting a foot on the plank and with another pushing the floor, we had to run forward. No one had ever seen such an amazing thing.

A scooter-ridden army rushed on the paved road of the round garden. In large numbers we rode round and round along the surroundings of the round garden in the morning sun. The round garden resounded with the sound of the wheels. Because of Bardadamashai's whimsicality we often had such strange playthings.

<sup>1</sup> *Bardadamashai* – eldest grandpa

Thus, when we had amassed many such toys, we arranged a fair displaying them. That year north Bengal was flooded. There was misery and distress everywhere. Many people were wandering resourceless – having no homes or shelter. Subscription was raised in different parts of the country to help the afflicted. We too were carried away by that stream and devoted ourselves in collecting subscription. We had innumerable toys gifted by Bardadamashai – some broken, some old or new. These were displayed in the fair which we called '*Mouchak*<sup>2</sup> Fair'. *Mouchak*, the children's magazine, was then very popular. Through that magazine we sent the money raised in the fair to the flood relief fund.

In this fair we had sold a good many toys and picture postcards. We had painted insignificant pictures which were transformed into much better ones by a few touches from the brushes of Bardadamashai and Dadamashai. Those pictures were sold at a considerable price. This was the year when our Kattababa enacted *Varshamangal* for the first time. Many persons, men of talent and erudition, used to come to see and hear the rehearsal of *Varshamangal*. During the intervals of the rehearsal we took them to our fair. We had no dearth of customers. One day we had brought even our Kattababa to the fair and he had bought our toys. Our biggest customer, however, was Bardadamashai. He was the biggest supplier of our playthings and also our main buyer.

In order to fatten the volume of subscription, we put even the scooters up for auction. Those were things of great fancy, but we freed ourselves of that fascination too. Bardadamashai came and purchased all the scooters, but he returned them all to us in the evening. We thought them as lost, and therefore, we were very happy getting them back. Once again we rode the scooters to our hearts' content. But the atmosphere of 'Mouchak Fair' – its deep enchantment – had possessed us and we were seized once again with the zeal for sacrifice. Once again we put the scooters up for auction. Having come to know of this, Bardadamashai came to the fair and purchased all the scooters a second time. However, he had lost faith in us, and therefore, he did not return the scooters to us till the end of the 'Mouchak Fair'. By doing so, he did well as the scooters ultimately remained with us.

<sup>2</sup> *Mouchak* – beehive or honeycomb

Then, one day unexpectedly Bardadamashai bought two model aeroplanes from somewhere. At that time real aeroplanes were rarely seen flying in the sky. We seemed to attain supreme bliss on getting the model aeroplane. When the blade of the aeroplane was let go by winding it with a piece of rubber, it flew into the sky. As there were many trees in our garden, the aeroplanes often fell down headlong suddenly and quickly among the trees, and their wings were broken. One day Bardadamashai went out with the broken aeroplanes to the sellers from whom he had brought them and asked if they could repair them. They answered, "Toys are brittle, buy new ones."

He said, "No."

This advice was not to Bardadamashai's liking. Instead of buying new aeroplanes, he went to various shops and bought gum, narrow pieces of wood, varnished paper, wire, nails and thread. At home he became engrossed with these things for some time. While trying to repair the broken ones, Bardadamashai found that with those materials, new aeroplanes could be made. He devised a very light glider that looked like the aeroplanes, but did not require a propeller, nor did it break when falling headlong. It also flew very far. Bardadamashai made gliders of many different shapes.

Once, an incident happened involving the glider. Bardadamashai was flying a very beautiful glider of his own creation. Suddenly a gutsy wind pushed the glider from below. It started flying like a bird. It was flying on and on and at last settled on the topmost branch of a mango tree. It was a huge tree; no one could reach its top. Servants and gardeners failed to climb up to the topmost branch. It could not be brought down by means of even a pole. Bardadamashai prohibited any further attempts, saying, "Don't prick its body; it may go off. Let it stay on the tree since it has chosen to be there." Thus, on that day Bardadamashai's glider remained on the mango tree.

Next morning Bardadamashai came to the veranda to paint a picture. As he was going to sit on his familiar spot, he saw that the glider was lying at his feet like a pet dog.

He began to call everybody, shouting, "Come and see. The naughty boy has come back." Hearing the uproar, when we went there we were astounded to see what had happened. We heard, "At night a stormy wind blew — riding that wind our inmate has come back home."

Then came the time of the boycott of foreign goods. People began to burn foreign clothes. Abandoning foreign essence and soap, they would bathe with powdered pulse. Bardadamashai too stopped buying foreign toys. For a long time we had no new toys in our house, no new tidbits; most of the playthings were old and broken. At that time it came to be known that there would be a native exhibition at Porabazar in Bhowanipur. Dadamashai said, "Let's go and see if there be any new things in the native exhibition." Bardadamashai said, "If there are toys, I will bring them."

The three brothers went to see the native exhibition at *Porabazar*<sup>3</sup>. They had started in the afternoon, and by the evening we had no knowledge of the fire that engulfed the exhibition. It was maternal uncle Nabu who had brought the news first. From where he had heard about it we know not, but his face turned white in fear. He said, "Not a single person could come out of the exhibition alive. All became singed flesh." Telephone calls were made one after another, men were sent to the spot. Everyone at home was terribly worried, but there was no trace of the Dadamashais. The place was called 'Porabazar' because many years ago it was burnt down once. It had caught fire a second time, and that made the people all the more afraid.

Then, after many hours the Dadamashais returned unhurt. They said that when the fire broke out, people began to run, jostle and push each other; and the pressure of the crowd being towards the gate, instead of going forward they took shelter in a quiet corner of the exhibition. They came out when it was all quiet. That was why they were so late.

All of us were eager to know what they had seen at the exhibition.

Mejdadamashai said, "Henceforth, we may not need to buy foreign goods. We have seen that now everything is being produced in our country." Dadamashai remarked, "We saw walls of fire. Hoses of the fire brigade were swarming like snakes and their spouts were hissing in anger. It was a real picture for drawing."

And Bardadamashai said, "I saw nothing new whatsoever. Gandhi is now busy with *charka* and *khadi*. Who will explore new things?"

Crestfallen we asked, "Was there nothing new?"

Both Bardadamashai and Dadamashai uttered together, "Yes, yes,

<sup>3</sup> *Pora* – burnt

we have got something. See."

They brought out from the depth of the pockets of their *jobbas*<sup>4</sup> two pieces of broken glass. A thick sheet of glass was broken in such a way that each bit looked like a paperweight. Inside of the glass was shattered with variegated artistry. Perhaps when the glass window of some shop became red hot by the blazing fire, just then cold water was sprinkled on them from the fire brigade hose. That was why they cracked and broke into chinks. Finding nothing new in all the exhibitions, the Dadamashais picked up those broken pieces.

At night we did not realize how beautiful the pieces were, but we were surprised to see them in the morning light. Inside them there were fine entangled lines and in between them an admixture of green and blue creating innumerable colours moving through them. The Dadamashais had picked up a really excellent thing from the Porabazar exhibition. Dadamashai's glass disappeared into the round wooden box in his desk amidst a jungle of collected tidbits. And Bardadamashai, sitting on his stool, began to observe the multi-coloured glass and its artistry by moving it in the morning light.

After being absorbed with this piece of glass for some time one day, an extremely enthusiastic Bardadamashai, on returning home in the evening, began to open a brown packet. We all stopped and craned forward to see what it was. We heard that he had bought an instrument to see colour. It was a foreign product, of course. By that time Bardadamashai might have decided that since the natives failed to create anything new, he would amuse himself buying foreign goods. What he had bought was disclosed as he opened the brown paper packet. It was a small instrument like a microscope.

If you put your eye to its hole and put a piece of glass or a transparent piece of stone to the other end, you could see many different colours. Broken pieces of glass, stones and diverse other things were collected. We put our eyes into it and saw green, violet, yellow, blue and red scattered on all sides from these broken pieces. It seemed like a fountain of light. If the instrument was turned a bit, colours changed and generated a new assemblage of colours. New waves of colour emanated. It all seemed such a source of amusement. Even today I do not have any clear idea of wherefrom Bardadamashai

<sup>4</sup> *jobba* – a kind of long and loose-fitting outer garment for men worn by the Muslims

brought the peculiar machine. I do not know whether it was a tool for analyzing rays, light or just a toy. But this much I knew – that Bardadamashai used it like a plaything. He would sit with it for hours on hours. Changing its position he used to see innumerable moving colours and called us now and then to see them. People go to see drama, bioscope, dance, pictures in exhibition, statues engraved in stone, but our Bardadamashai only saw colours.

Most people do not know that this was the beginning of Bardadamashai's Cubist pictures. Amusing himself with colours and lines seen through this apparatus, Bardadamashai found inspiration for his Cubist paintings. Seeing the first pictures painted in this style, we at once said, "Oh no! We have seen similar pictures through that instrument." Bardadamashai has many famous pictures painted in Cubist style. A few of these famous pictures such as '*Dui Alokporir Nritya*' (Dance of Two Fire-Fairies) are representations of what we had seen through that lens.

Bardadamashai had always this fancy for new playthings. His art of painting was also a sort of sport. He played with colour, brush and paper. He painted pictures in a way as though it were a game. He tore off the paper if it was not to his liking and painted anew. His paper basket was often filled with torn pictures. Ransacking his basket and sorting through those rejected bits of paper and cutting and removing their edges, we often collected beautiful pictures.

## Chapter 13

We used to play football in the eastern part of the garden which we called the 'big garden'. That was our playground. To make the goalposts we fixed two bamboo poles on the two ends of the ground and procured a leather ball. This was enough to start a game. In spite of having a ball and goalpost, it was often quite difficult for us to arrange two full teams of players. We did not have so many boys of our age so as to have two teams of six or seven players each. Therefore, we had to play with whatever number of players was available on a particular day.

One year towards the end the rainy season we were kicking the ball with great enthusiasm in our garden, damp and slushy from continuous rain. Just then a group of boys of our age appeared and said, "We have come to play a match with you."

We did not know who they were nor had we ever seen them. There were a few football clubs in our locality with whom we may have played matches. We thought they might belong to one of those clubs or they might be members of some new club. Soon we understood our mistake. They were from Santiniketan, they said. They belonged to the dramatic group that had arrived at Jorasanko from Santiniketan to perform *Sharodotsav*<sup>1</sup>. If that be so, we should not put them in the opposite team. Therefore, we split into two groups, mingling them with our boys, and began to play football with great delight in muddy water. So many boys filled the playground, and the match was very enjoyable. We were so much involved in the game that both we as well as they forgot about their rehearsal. They did not remember that they would have to rehearse before Kattababa in the evening.

When news arrived in the evening that Kattababa had already appeared in the library of House No. 5 where the rehearsal would be held, the boys found that it was impossible for them to appear at the rehearsal as smeared with mud they had a ghostly appearance. But Kattababa was already waiting there. Besides Kattababa there were

<sup>1</sup> *Sharodotsav* – autumnal festival

our three Dadamashais and many other people. How could they go before them in that state? But they had not time enough to bathe and appear in clean dress. If they were late to appear at the rehearsal, Kattababa would scold them in a language which would not appear like a rebuke but everyone knew how they would be ashamed later. Santiniketan boys were thus in great difficulty.

Tarak said, "Instead of feeling ashamed of being late, it is better to be chided for being smeared with dirt. And we should be greatly relieved if no one notices our soiled clothes."

We remarked, "There is little chance of that. The library room is so lighted that everyone will notice you."

Since there was no way to escape, Santi, Tarak, Markondi, Nirmal and others hurriedly washed themselves in the springwater. Golap, being the goalkeeper, was clean in his dress; and therefore, he only stood witnessing what others were doing. Seeing the boys to be so late and knowing that they were playing football, Dadamashai came and stood on the second floor veranda to the south of the library room. Looking down to the garden, he saw them cleansing themselves in the fountain.

"Come soon, all of you. Uncle Rabi, Dinu and others have already appeared."

The boys saw that they had been caught and there was no way out. Therefore, one by one they went along the round wooden stair, up to the southern veranda of the second floor. Dadamashai was still standing there. As the boys were hesitating, he asked, "What happened to you, my boys?"

A boy frightfully showed the state of his soiled clothes. Dadamashai said smilingly, "You are going to take part in a theatre, but do not know how to dress up. Wear the *dhoti* in a different way. Just see what I do." Saying this, he changed the plaited ends of the boy's loin cloth in such a way that all the dirt came to be covered. In addition the boys learned a new style of wearing a *dhoti* which would be well suited on the stage. Following the first boy, all the other boys also covered the mud-smeared parts of their *dhotis*. Then they entered the library room, one after another and sat by Uncle Dinu.

At once the rehearsal and songs began. Uncle Dinu did the role of Thakurdada, Kattababa that of the saint, Jagadanandababu played Laksheswar, and Nitu Upananda. Kattababa normally would first

perform his rehearsals in front of our Dadamashai. They used to pass comments, and Kattababa heard them carefully and often made changes, if necessary.

Many times he left with them the charge of training the actors. Once during the rehearsal of *Shapmochan*<sup>2</sup> or *Arupratan*<sup>3</sup>, Aruda was watching the training. There was the role of a watchman. The way the watchman walked was not to the liking of Kattababa or anyone else. Aruda said, "I'll demonstrate!" Aruda himself was a great actor. Besides, he had a peculiar way of rapping his feet along with the strokes of his stick. When that was demonstrated by him, Kattababa said, "This is exactly what I want." Thus Aruda's walking style was included in Kattababa's play, and for a long time we saw Aruda walking like that. He used to walk regularly from the end of our football ground to the *champa* tree at the other end, striking his feet with the strokes of his stick. A pathway was formed where his feet crushed the grass.

That year when the rehearsal of *Shardotsav* began in our house, Kattababa wished Bardadamashai to take a role in it. Bardadamashai used to play the part of the king, and that role suited him well. Mejdadamashai played the minister. Of course there was a king, but he was quite a small king and would not suit Bardadamashai. He, who was the king of kings, appeared as a saint in the play, and that role was being done by Kattababa. Therefore, Kattababa created the roles of a real king and a real minister and added that to the original script. Bardadamashai was the king and Mejdadamashai his minister. In this way *Sharodotsav* was turned into *Rhinshodh* (Repayment of Loan) and it was staged with a lot of changes.

That evening the boys frolicked and sang songs, and no one could see that they came to the rehearsal in mud-spattered clothes.

Only Uncle Dinu once said, "Tarak, you have worn the *dhoti* in a fine style. Do appear on the stage wearing the *dhoti* in the same style." After this incident Dadamashai became quite intimate with the boys from Santiniketan. Rehearsal being over one night and after finishing their bath and dinner, two boys came to our house from the other house and appeared before Dadamashai. One said, "I want to hear stories," while the other wanted to see pictures.

<sup>2</sup> *Shapmochan* – a dance drama of Tagore's

<sup>3</sup> *Arupratan* – a dance drama of Tagore's

Dadamashai said, "Is it so? You are truant boys and must have fled from school without telling your master. *Rabika*<sup>4</sup> will scold me if I tell you stories at this hour of night."

They admitted that they had escaped stealthily after the rest of the boys got inside their mosquito nets. Dadamashai added, "Go back to your bed. It is quite late at night. All day you have toiled hard. Now have some rest. Come tomorrow morning, I'll tell you stories."

Next day when they came quite early in the morning, Dadamashai told them stories and painted pictures for them. Thus he came to have a warm friendship with a few Santiniketan boys. Before this time whenever students of Santiniketan came, they came for a day just to sing songs during the *Maghotsav*<sup>5</sup>. They had never been here for so long at a time and in such intimate friendships with us. Bardadamashai and Mejdadamashai had joined them in acting. They wished Dadamashai also to take up some role in the play. But as the rehearsal was quite advanced, no new role could be given to him. Dadamashai had a spiral stick, so curved, distorted and grotesque, that it had to be seen. Wherefrom he had procured that stick we knew not. But he used to say that he had got it from his aunt's house and that it was the stick of the ghosts and fairies. It was as crooked as it was durable and hard. That stick he gave to Jagadanandababu to use in the role of Laksheswar.

"This time I'll enact my role through this stick," he said to the boys. It suited very well in the hand of Laksheswar.

Ultimately, however, not only the stick but Dadamashai himself had to appear in the acting of *Sharodotsav*.

We had become quite intimate with those boys. Dividing ourselves in groups, we used to play a football match, swing on a rocking cradle, sing songs, run about, and after rehearsal go to the other house to gossip. The rehearsals continued for some time, and then the time arrived for enacting the play on the stage. When everything was ready, a telegram came from Santiniketan with the news that Uncle Dinu ought to go back to Santiniketan. Dwarakanath's eldest son was Debendranath. Debendranath's eldest son was Dwijendranath

<sup>4</sup> *Rabika* – uncle, 'Ka' for 'Kaka' meaning paternal uncle in Bengali

<sup>5</sup> *Maghotsav* – festival observed by Bramho Samaj in the month of Magha, the tenth month of the Bengali calendar (from the middle of January to the middle of February)

whose eldest son was Dwipendranath. Dwipendranath's elder son was Dinendranath. Thus, for five generations the name of the eldest sons began with the letter 'D'. The eldest member of Dwijendranath's family was passing away and, therefore, Dinumama had to leave. He was doing the role of Thakurda in the play, the most important role after that of the saint. It seemed that *Sharodotsav* would come to a halt. Tickets had been sold, the stage had been set -- Kattababa had never been in such an awkward situation.

Dinumama left Santiniketan. News arrived by a telegram that Dipuda passed away, and so Dinumama would not be able to act. What to do? Kattababa began to consult with the Dadamashais. Everyone was depressed. There was this bereavement and besides, after so much preparation the play was going to be stalled. The merriment of the boys came to an end. Not one of them came to play football even. Discussions continued. Then it was heard that *Sharodotsav* would not be stopped and Dadamashai would be doing the role of Thakurda.

There was just one day's time.

Dadamashai said, "Rabika, I won't be able to memorize the script. I will say whatever comes to my mind."

This, however, was not a headache to Kattababa. He was unworried conferring the role of Thakurda on Dadamashai. The boys had lost their Thakurda, but they were overwhelmed with joy of getting another Thakurdada and knowing that the play would be staged.

Dadamashai summoned Pramatha Bishee, who was the prompter of the play and told him that the prompter would have to walk on the stage.

Wearing a mask, Pramathababu appeared on the stage. Carrying on a pole the script of *Sharodotsav* covered in coloured paper, he went on supplying words to Dadamashai. Without memorizing the script Dadamashai began to utter the words of Thakurda partly with the help of Pramatha Bishee and partly by his own creative power and he kept pace with the boys.

In the first scene when the boys completed the song *Megher Kole Rod Hesechhe, Badal Gaechhe Tuti* (Sunshine is Glowing Around the Cloud and the Rain is Over), Laksheswar would chase them. Thakurdada would enter the stage saying, "What happened,

Lakshada! Why such a menacing appearance?" But we do remember that omitting all those words, Dadamashai entered the stage overwhelming the audience with his cry, "Break! Break! We have a break!" This made the boys so glad that they did not require to be dictated to any more. Along with Dadamashai they became enraptured with the extempore acting and dialogues.

That year *Sharodotsav* was really enjoyable. It was feared that Uncle Dinu's sudden absence would spoil everything. No one else had as fine a voice as Uncle Dinu, and because of his absence the songs of *Sharodotsav* were somewhat crippled. However, the absence of Dinumama, an expert actor, was somewhat compensated by Dadamashai. Dadamashai saved Kattababa from impending disaster without going through the rehearsal and without memorizing the script.

When I think of *Sharodotsav*, it seems that it was not acted only on the stage, but as if the play was enacted in the entire house of Jorasanko, in every nook and corner of it, in the veranda and roof, in the glistening leaves of coconut trees and in our minds. The festival began on a rain-washed day in the month of *Bhadra*<sup>6</sup> and ended on a silvery moonlit night of *Aswin*<sup>7</sup>. When the festival came to an end, thus making everyone depressed, we were informed that on the day before the departure of the party, arrangements had been made to show a film to the boys. We were also included in that team. It was considered a matter of great privilege in those days to watch a film, irrespective of what film it was. A boy had such an opportunity only once in a while.

The film was shown by darkening our billiard room and hanging a white curtain. Besides the boys, the Dadamashais also saw the film. At first a picture of Kattababa was shown when he was going by aeroplane from England to Paris.

That was perhaps the first occasion when he had boarded a plane and that was indeed a very exciting affair. After that, the play *Dhruva* was shown.

After the screening of the film, Bardadadamashai painted a cartoon picture of Kattababa. In this famous cartoon the poet is flying on his

<sup>6</sup> *Bhadra* – fifth month of the Bengali calendar from the middle of August to the middle of September

<sup>7</sup> *Aswin* – from the middle of September to the middle of October

chair in the air; along with him are flying his poetical works. It was named 'The Poet's Pleasure-Trip in the Air'. That was printed in Bardadamashai's picture book *Naba Hullor*. The painting of the picture having been finished, Bardadamashai was sitting with the picture on his lap when Gopal, the manager of the other house, came to the southern veranda on some business. He used to distribute the invitation cards of *Maghotsav*. But he did not ever give more than one ticket to anyone. There was always just a single ticket in his box – not more, nor less. Whoever demanded more than one ticket was shown the box and Gopalbabu would say that he had only one ticket and would give to the person that single ticket. No one, however, was to go empty-handed.

Bardadamashai asked him, "What do you think of this picture, Gopal?" With folded hands full of humility, Gopal responded, "Yes, my good master." Bardadamashai asked again, "Do you recognize the person?"

"Yes, I do."

"Can you say who he is?"

Standing with folded hands, Gopalbabu went on hesitating.

Encouraging him, Bardadamashai said, "Speak out, Gopal! Speak fearlessly."

Bending his head and smiling shyly, Gopalbabu said, "Yes, sir, *Babamashai*<sup>8</sup> is flying."

For a long time afterwards, Gopalbabu's words remained a matter of amusement and it was a favourite hearsay in the Jorasanko House.

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<sup>8</sup> *Babamashai* – Tagore was thus addressed by employees and menials in Jorasanko House

## Chapter 14

Kattababa often excited and animated all in Jorasanko by his preparations for acting. When the Santiniketan team was not yet formed, everything was done by the Calcutta team. Kattababa had to come to Calcutta for collecting players. He used to rope Dadamashai into his team; other friends and relatives also joined them. Some people came from Santiniketan too. Thus, the whole team was constituted and Jorasanko House became lively. Both the houses would seem to have gone through a metamorphosis. Studies and games almost came to a stop.

As the rehearsal began we noticed that among the juniors no one else but Aunt Khuki would be invited to join Kattababa's team. She once became very renowned for acting in the role of Malini in *Dakghar*<sup>1</sup>. From that time she was deemed valuable. The rest had no role to play in his drama. Or it might be that he considered none competent. Therefore, we had always remained among the spectators. However, we had great pleasure in witnessing the rehearsal every evening, day after day after day. So the dialogues of every character and even Kattababa's style of training them would remain etched in our memory. So long as we heard his instructions we did not regret that we were not to act. But when the theatre would be over, the group of players would disperse and Kattababa would return to Santiniketan; the desire to stage a play of our own would awaken in us.

This desire inspired us to do something on our own instead of depending on others. It was our good fortune that we did so, or we would not have known that among us there were expert actors like Kokomama, Kalumama, Sovanlal or Sujan whose abilities were no less than that of the reputed actors of Kattababa's group. Among them, Sovanlal, later in life, became quite famous as an actor. We found a play named *Espar-ospar*<sup>2</sup> written by Dadamashai and

<sup>1</sup> *Dakghar* – a play by Tagore

<sup>2</sup> *Espar-ospar* – a play by Abanindra Nath Tagore; the Bengali expression means a final decision or settlement

published in *Bharati*<sup>3</sup>.

At once began the distribution of characters as well as a rehearsal. There were a few songs in the play. We held Prasanta Roy to take charge of the music. He alone knew how to play the harmonium. He went on playing the instrument with an attempt to set tune to the lyrics, while we were reading the book with a view to decide which roles would suit those among us. All this we did on the ground floor while Dadamashai stayed on the second-floor veranda. Somehow he came to know that we were engaged in conducting a rehearsal. Unexpectedly one day he came down to us and asked, "For what is this rehearsal?"

"*Espar-ospar*," we answered.

We showed him the play which we had copied from the pages of *Bharati* and handed it over to him. He turned it upside down and then said, "Now I do remember that I wrote this play. Your choice is quite good. But this is an opera, not quite like one of Rabika's plays. Whatever it be, go on. Let's see what you make out of it."

We found encouragement in his words. We had already allotted Prasantababu to set tune to the lyrics. Besides, he was given the role of an artist as he also painted pictures. When Dadamashai came, the rehearsal was going on.

The artist was saying, "Don't you know that I am an artist? It is not easy to please me. I know how to play music, how to dance and how to sing. Even the forest deer, birds on a tree, river water, the moon, the sun, stars, light and darkness stand before me like a painted picture transfixed."

Prasantababu painted pictures and he was an artist, but he was full of fun and good humour. Those grave and sublime words did not suit him well. Hearing his rendering of the speech, Dadamashai said, "Four words have to be changed. You can't even utter the phrase 'like a painted picture transfixed'. Let me see what the others have done. Go on uttering your speeches one by one."

He heard the whole script and then went away with the exercise-book under his arm.

We were happy and thought that since Dadamashai took it over, it would be a success.

All afternoon he went on altering the script. In the evening, giving

<sup>3</sup> *Bharati* – a magazine

it to me he said, "Now copy it."

I saw that he had made many alterations in the script and had created a new role of a bandmaster for Prasantababu. "I have wiped out the theatrical element," he said. "It has been moulded as a true opera now. You will see how it works. Go on with your rehearsal and memorize the parts. Then one day I will come to see your rehearsal."

I could copy very fast and copied the whole script before evening. I read it for everyone. It was found that those who had already memorized their dialogues would have to learn anew.

We thought Dadamashai would come after a few days. But he could not wait. The very next day he came to our haunt. That day our rehearsal was a great success. Prasantababu adapted to his new role of bandmaster with ease. Kumud Pal came to see the rehearsal. Dadamashai said, "Why sit idle? I'll create a role for you. Would you like to be a policeman?"

Instantly a song was ready.

"Oh my mind  
Be a judge now.  
If you be a judge,  
Let me be your orderly  
An orderly dwelling in Braja."

Kumud Pal joined the opera quite gladly. Dadamashai said, "You'll have to dance with the song, the dance of a policeman."

The exercise book in which I had neatly copied the script was panned through once again. He wrote a lot more, and I had to copy the corrected pages once again.

Next day the rehearsal continued. Dadamashai's correction followed suit and so did my copying. Endless alterations, additions and subtractions went on. Then I was compelled to play the prompter because I felt that if things went on changing in this way, no one would be able to memorize the dialogue, and with the manuscript in hand, I would have to supply words to everyone's mouth.

Dadamashai said, "What harm? I'll include the prompter in the opera. He'll move around and prompt to every actor!"

Cocomama had a role which was changed into Raktamurti. Girls like Arati and Aspali were just seeing the rehearsal. Dadamashai said,

"Wait, I'll make you *sakhis*<sup>4</sup> in the opera." He began to compose songs for them. After musing for a while, he said, "Let two *sakhis* dance on both sides of the policeman."

Then he began to polish the songs. Since it had been composed as an opera, its songs had to be changed and tuned anew. For so long Prasantababu was in charge of the songs, but now he was rid of this responsibility. He played the harmonium while Dadamashai went on teaching new tunes by patting his knee. Some of the songs were rewritten. He also found out many a song of *Dehatatwa*<sup>5</sup> and *Fakir*'s<sup>6</sup> songs. A song of Nahush was like the following:

"Let it float  
Away from the shore, away from all work.  
Let my boat float off  
The boat of my mind."

It was substituted with:

"How long shall I play a cowboy?  
Six cattle of the herd  
Have worn me out.  
If I do take the straight track  
They would ever follow the crooked one."

A song fetched out of an old manuscript was also included:

"Where is my heart's bliss, soul's solace?  
Whoever I ask ruefully  
Turns about and makes me spin round.  
Whom should I ask? Who is aggrieved like me?  
To counsel me, to help me unite with my soul's treasures."

We had been in the habit of listening to Kattababa's song – accustomed to the tune of Rabindrasangeet. These tunes seemed so new to us; but when we sang these songs together, it seemed that we were going to achieve something great.

"It's a dark night overcast with clouds,  
No lamp to lighten the bridal chamber,  
The king is alone, the queen's away  
And her maid has fled."

No stage decoration was there; the scene of a dark night overcast

<sup>4</sup> *sakhi* – friend

<sup>5</sup> *Dehatatwa* – the doctrine that the body is the seat of all truths

<sup>6</sup> *Fakir* – (Muslim) a mendicant ascetic, a fakir

with clouds, the king's helplessness – all this was to be depicted through the song. The music was to help the scene; the song was to be sung likewise.

But he got stuck with the tune of a song. The bandmaster was finally named as Rang Sahib and an English song had to be composed to fit his role. The song began with *abcd* and ended with *xyz*. Dadamashai was in great distress as he could not put music to these English alphabets. For a couple of days the struggle continued. Prasantababu became tired sitting continually at the harmonium. One evening after a fruitless attempt when Dadamashai left for bathing and Prasantababu was going to start his motor-bike, suddenly Dadamashai came running. His body was all wet, lungi folded above the knee and water dripping off his body. He was bathing in a tub full to the brim with water. Plunging his body in it he had showered water on his head when the tune flashed. Crying 'Eureka! Eureka!' Like Archimedes he came to us from the bathtub.

"Get it to heart, at once, or I may forget it." Saying this he went on singing along with waving his hand, with Prasantababu at the harmonium.

"ABCDEFG!  
HIJKLMNOP!  
QRSTUV!  
WXYZ ABC!"

"Just see – ABC is to be added after XYZ. All the difficulty appeared from there. The tune came to mind as the cold water refreshed me."

Page after page of the opera thus underwent transformation very frequently. I was copying very fast, but I could not keep up with Dadamashai. The more I was copying, the more he was changing the script. No one could memorize the dialogue any longer. Every day Didima from Benepukur asked over the telephone if the rehearsal would be held. In fact the rehearsal was held, not a single day it was stopped. Every evening Didima came to Jorasanko. But every day she saw some new character or new song. The text changed every day.

We were in great difficulty. Dadamashai's enthusiasm knew no bounds. But in this way our opera was never getting ready. Every day after the rehearsal he took away the exercise book and returned

it with a lot of changes. Repeatedly did I copy it neatly, while Dadamashai changed it by cutting off a good deal. Then I decided that the script of the opera must be kept hidden. Except what has been memorized of the text, for the rest of it we should have to depend on prompting. We told Dadamashai that we had fixed the date of the performance of the opera. We couldn't delay it any longer – the performance would be staged day after tomorrow.

Hearing this Dadamashai said, "That is well enough. Let it be performed. But a dress rehearsal is necessary."

During the dress rehearsal we all appeared properly dressed. Rang Sahib wore a pantaloons, his head bound with a deep red bathing towel and a folded chadar thrown on his coat. Dadamashai dictated everything as to where the different characters would sit, where *Turi and Juri*<sup>7</sup> would stand and sing. The uncertainty that haunted us for so long as to when the opera would be staged was at once driven away. Now we were assured that the opera would be staged. Rehearsal was over. During the rehearsal the script used to be kept in the fold of the harmonium in the hall. After some time Dadamashai came in search of the script. Lifting the lid of the harmonium he saw that the script was not there. He shouted, "Oh, the script has been stolen. Look for it."

I began to search for it here and there, but could not find it. How could I? Because I myself had hidden it somewhere else. After a prolonged search for it, Dadamashai understood what had happened and said nothing.

Tota was given the role of 'danri'<sup>8</sup>. He was to talk and would not move or swing, and looked like a 'danri' that marks the end of a sentence. Dadamashai wanted to make his part a little more entertaining. But as the script was missing, it was not possible to make his role pleasant and Dadamashai said that there would be no need of charm or sweetness – 'Danri' needs to be dry. A boy named Ghantu came to hear the rehearsal. Dadamashai said to him, "Why do you sit like this? Come, I'll give you a role in the opera. Will you act in the role of a shoe-lifter? Ghantu was overwhelmed to get a role. He was quite happy to be only a shoe-lifter. Dadamashai said,

<sup>7</sup> *Turi and Juri* – singers in an opera

<sup>8</sup> *danri* – an exclamation mark in Bengali that marks the end of a sentence like a full stop or period

"Since the script is missing, I won't give you any words to utter. You'll only whistle." Ghentu had a peculiar capacity. He could whistle like a bulbul. His role was to enter the stage with a covered cage, steal a pair of shoes, put them in the cage and walk off of the stage while whistling as though training a *shyama*<sup>9</sup>.

After two days we performed the opera *Espar-ospar* quite pompously in the lighted hall of the second floor. There was no stage decoration, no footlight, no spotlight, in fact nothing – only a series of words, music and gestures unfolded scene after scene. Our only resources were our indomitable spirit and enthusiasm and Dadamashai's never-ending encouragement.

We attempted to separate the audience from the actors by fastening a rope from one door of the hall to another. When Dadamashai came, he at once flung the rope away. He said, "Your opera will be full of grandeur if you draw into your fold all who come to see it." And really it so happened. Those who witnessed the performance enjoyed it and became oblivious of themselves. They seemed to take part in the acting itself.

Kattababa came to see it after the opera had been staged for three days. Tucking his legs under him, he sat along with others in the hall. While leaving, he laughed profusely and said, "This is something which none else but Aban can do."

Our expenses for the opera amounted to thirteen and a half *annas*<sup>10</sup>, as we had to buy some corks which were then burnt to make beard and moustaches. Besides that we had to buy coloured paper and rope. The most costly thing was the falchion of Raktamurti. The cardboard and sparkling tinfoil that we had to buy for this falchion cost us twelve annas.

<sup>9</sup> *shyama* – a songbird of the thrush family

<sup>10</sup> *anna* – one-sixteenth of the old rupee

## Chapter 15

The trees in our garden did not require much nursing. They were somewhat self-sustaining. We could move about carelessly among them. There were only two gardeners. One of them, who was the chief gardener, thought that his only business was chieftaincy; and when the number of his subordinates dwindled to only one, he did neither the job of the chief nor that of the gardener. The little bit of care that the trees required was taken by Mejdadamashai. Seeds of *dopati*, *cosmos* and marigold brought by Jogy, the gardener, were planted according to Mejdadamashai's direction. He pointed out the spots at the edge of the narrow lane and Jogy planted the saplings. Where to plant the bush of *sandhyamani* and *kunda*, where it would be suitable to lodge land-lotus, *sondal*, *bakphool*, how far the cluster of *rangan* had to be trimmed – all this was Mejdadamashai's concern. We had heard that the cocoa tree and pine trees brought from Kumayun were planted by Mejdadamashai. Bardadamashai and Dadamashai were not concerned with these. They became happy seeing the trees and expressed their approval. After his siesta Bardadamashai came out to the veranda and narrowing his eyes stared at the deep green of the garden. He alone knew what he looked at. Then, lifting his head, he looked at the peaks of the coconut trees and then painted in Chinese ink a picture of a cluster of coconut trees against the autumnal sky. During the rains when *margosh* and *bakul*<sup>1</sup> trees bent down under the weight of their leaves drenched in water, Bardadamashai painted a rather wet picture of the trees, adding a few swallows to them. From many pictures of Bardadamashai one could smell the garden of Jorasanko.

Dadamashai's fancy for rearing the garden was rather different. He never planted big trees, fruit trees or flower plants. At the entrance of the round table there was a *manasa*<sup>2</sup> thicket full of fine thorns and dot-like red flowers all the year. People said that was the only tree planted by Dadamashai in the garden. He had also many tubs made of China clay. He used to fill those tubs with mud and boulders and

<sup>1</sup> *bakul* – large evergreen tree with sweet scented flower

<sup>2</sup> *manasa* – a plant of cactus family

plant trees of different kinds in them, but he did not let them grow. Those trees remained ever small like the bonsai of the Japanese. To the north of the round garden on its left side there was a cluster of *madhabilata* raised on a scaffold by bamboos. In its dense foliage dove and *tuntuni*<sup>3</sup> built their nests, and gathering its dry leaves we used to make brooms for our doll's house. Amidst all this, by the edge of the tiled road, were placed rows of Dadamashai's tubs on a brick-made shelf. One or two tubs in which the plants had attained considerable growth were often taken to the second-floor veranda and placed on the planks fixed to the eastern railings of the veranda. Sitting on his chair Dadamashai beheld the advent of the sunrise and that of the full moon.

The best among these was a tamarind tree. It was seen by many people. Dadamashai felt quite proud of that tree and it had drawn his greatest care. When the trunk was soft, he bent it by binding it with a rope. We had seen the tree like that. Its branches were covered with green leaves. The boulders at its bottom were covered with green moss. Grasshoppers rested on its branches. We seemed to grow smaller looking at the tree and the tree grew in stature while its roots coiling along the boulders seemed to penetrate into the depths of the earth. The base of the tree seemed to be shrouded in dark mystery.

We had heard that a Japanese carpenter named Kasahara came to work in Jorasanko House. He had wonderful skill in doing woodwork. But what Dadamashai discovered was more astonishing. Kasahara was not only a good carpenter, but he had an expert hand in Japanese landscape gardening. Dadamashai brought him to the garden and said, "Look at this garden, Kasahara. See what you can do to improve it." Kasahara said, "I've started working with the doors and windows of your library room. Let me finish them. Then I can think of the garden. But even now I may use a weapon on a tree. Come with me!"

Saying this he came back to the library room with Dadamashai. He made them stand just behind the round window he was making on the eastern wall of the library room and said, "Look at the tree before you." In front of them there was a large *sisoo* tree projecting its innumerable branches. Pointing to two thick branches he said,

<sup>3</sup> *tuntuni* – the tailor bird

"Those branches will be lopped off. They are overshadowing the eastern sky. Once I open the sky you will see the grand appearance of the moon."

Saying this with an axe in hand, Kasahara himself climbed the *sisoo* tree and removed two thick branches from the middle of the tree by a few strokes. At once the whole eastern sky came out through the two huge, slightly crooked arms of the tree – the window and the garden, garden and the tree, the sky along with the tree. In Kasahara's hands the window of the library room and the artistic arrangement of the branches of the *sisoo* tree found full consistency as though painted on a canvas.

Dadamashai felt that Kasahara was not an ordinary mechanic, but a real artist. He said, "Kasahara! Your power, your artistic sense must have its full development. This garden of Jorasanko is not for you. It would have been worthwhile if we could employ you for a long time. But that is beyond me. Here, in this house you will be ever remembered because of the skill you have displayed on a single tree. I'll arrange a good garden for you. But before that, please bring from your country a few bonsai to be placed by the window."

Dadamashai arranged an employment for Kasahara in Emerald Bower, the garden house of Prodyot Kumar Thakur at Kashipore. There Kasahara bedecked a part of the garden according to his choice. He had a wonderful talent to implant trees, let them grow and then bring out their inherent beauty by cutting off the branches. He had created a Japanese landscape garden in Prodyot Kumar's house. In those days there was not a single person, no man of wisdom and talent who was not attracted by that garden.

Meanwhile three dwarfish trees in tubs arrived from Japan. They were very beautiful, real Japanese bonsai, and looked excellent when placed by the side of the east-facing round window designed by Kasahara. Dadamashai saw the moon looking like a golden plate from behind the bonsai and the *sisoo* tree stretching its two arms in the air. But in the hot temperature of our country, the Japanese bonsai withered away. Only the empty tubs remained.

Once again Kasahara was summoned. To him Dadamashai said, "Foreign trees won't last in alien soil and air. Please teach me how a tree can be made into a dwarf. I'll make bonsai of the native trees."

Kasahara answered, "I've learnt how to make a tree spruce and

orderly by cutting the branches of a big tree. I also know how to bedeck a garden. What do I know about making a tree a dwarf? Bonsai is a special science. Many men of merit are engaged in its cultivation."

Dadamashai said, "Be as it may, what you yourself know will be enough for me. Come, let us start together. Something will surely come out of our brains." Then together they planted a tamarind tree on a tub, and then employing various devices they really made it a dwarf. This was the much acclaimed tamarind tree of Dadamashai's, and this was his first bonsai.

This tamarind tree and several other trees became small in size. Not only that, their branches and leaves also became small. But Dadamashai had many other trees whose leaves wouldn't remain small while the rest of the trees remained dwarfish. When the buds of leaves sprouted, Dadamashai pulled them up by means of his nails instead of scissors or a knife. He used to say, "Let the poison of the nails touch them and then their leaves will be small." He had learnt that device from Kasahara. But the few trees that in spite of being small themselves did not yield to make their leaves small were Dadamashai's headache. He said, "Just see their spirit — as if they would burst out of the tubs. The more I uproot them, the more they sprout." Once he gave away a similar *pakur*<sup>4</sup> tree to Nandada and said, "Go, plant this tree in your garden at Kalabhavan. Let it grow there. It doesn't feel like staying here."

Nandada carried it with all respect to Santiniketan and put it in the soil of Kalabhavan. After about two years Dadamashai went to Kalabhavan and saw that the *pakur* tree of the tub had become quite huge.

Seeing the tree he remarked, "Being confined in a tub for so long has made its growth stunted. See the wonder it has done after its release."

One year he went to the hill station of Kurseung. We all accompanied him. After the *puja*<sup>5</sup> it was very cold in the hills; still he woke up quite early in the morning. Waking up he bound a strip of cloth round his legs like the sepoys. Then with a Tibetan over-coat on and an iron-plated pointed stick in hand, he went toward Pankha-

<sup>4</sup> *pakur* — a species of fig-tree

<sup>5</sup> *puja* — main Hindu festival — Durga puja

-Bari road.

His attention might be drawn to a piece of stone by the roadside or in a forest. He would poke at it and pull it up. He did not, however, really get stones in Kurseung. He used to say, "The soil is covered with moss and wild bush. How can one bind a piece of stone in such a soil?"

Unexpectedly one day he came back quite late. He had put off his hat — there were drops of sweat on his forehead, the stick was in his right hand and the broken head of the stick in his left. He seemed very excited. He said, "Come sharp with a crowbar." He thought he might have discovered a diamond mine. Then we knew that it was not so. He found an excellent dwarfish tree by the roadside. He tried to pull it up by loosening the soil, but he could not. Then he poked at it hard with the pointed head of the stick. That too was of no avail. Finally, when with the head of the stick he gave an upward stroke with force, the pointed head itself broke off. Taking Amrit Bahadur and a crowbar with us, we went with Dadamashai. We became completely forgetful of our bath and meal. It was a distance of about a mile. Reaching the spot we found that the tree was not by the side of the road but on the road itself. Raising a few big stones Dadamashai had already dug a hole on the public thoroughfare. What would happen if the municipality employees saw it? It was, however, not the time to think about all this. How beautiful the tree was! It had a twisted and hard body and tiny leaves. A real bonsai.

Dadamashai said, "See, the tree seems to be readymade. How can I let it go? Be quick to push the crowbar or we may be caught in the act."

Dadamashai had a specially gifted eye. Many walked along this road, but no one caught the sight of this beautiful bonsai which if pulled up could be decked with boulders in a tub. Whoever set eyes on it would be charmed. Amrit Bahadur went on digging the soil. What calamity! The more he dug the more came out the roots. The top of the tree was very small but even when an arm's length and a half of the soil was dug, the roots seemed unending. We saw that roots hard like iron twisted down into the soil, splitting the stones.

Dadamashai said, "It seems to have gone down to the underworld. Such a long root cannot be put in a tub. What can be done then?"

When Dadamashai was saying this, Amrit Bahadur, by a sudden

pull, brought out the tree and its roots.

It was late in the day and therefore the road was empty. We had managed to fill the hole with mud and boulders.

Dadamashai said, "Do take the tree. Let us see if we can adorn it."

Digging the soil we planted the tree on the same day. A tree with such long roots could not be planted in a tub. We sprinkled water at its bottom and took great care of it. In spite of all this, the tree could not be saved. So stout and strong the tree was, yet its leaves dried up in a few days and dropped off one by one. They became dry and hard as wood.

Now Dadamashai said, "Not to bring it up would have been better. It grew by absorbing the sap of the stone. How can it live on the juice of the soil?"

Let me tell you a story of Jorasanko:

Once when the rainy season seemed to have ended and the autumnal sunshine was already peeping, the rains came back again rather abruptly. Showers poured from a dark sky. Damp air and incessant rains followed. For eight days it dripped ceaselessly. It was not possible to go out of doors. Books, exercise books, clothes – all became damp. The floor of the veranda was never dry. Dadamashai always sat in the veranda staring at the showers. Then suddenly one night when the rains ceased and our garden was sparkling in sunshine, Dadamashai had gone to the garden very early in the morning before any of us woke up. Generally he did not have much sleep at night. Therefore, even in darkness he felt that the rains had stopped and the sky was brightening.

Waking up we heard that Dadamashai's tamarind tree was stolen. Getting into the garden at dawn he saw that the tree was not in the midst of the fountain where it used to be. It had vanished stealthily. It was not found anywhere.

Deep in thought Dadamashai was sitting in the second-floor veranda. In his mouth there was a half-burnt cheroot with no fuel in it. Even then he was puffing at it. Seeing us he asked, "Can you recall to whom I did say that the dwarf trees sell for a thousand rupees in Japan?"

We replied, "This you have told to many." Saying this we named a few honest and gentle visitors both native and foreign who often

visited the Jorasanko House.

Dadamashai said, "I cannot rely on anyone. Everyone coveted my tamarind tree. Who knows if it has not gone back to Japan? The other day I said to somebody that when this tamarind tree will bear fruit its price will be ten thousand rupees."

Dadamashai had long dreamt that his tamarind tree would bear fruit as small as a silkworm. Many a time he had told us this.

But in the severe rain of the last few days no one gentle or not so gentle seemed to have crossed the gate of Jorasanko House.

At that time for the most part our house was in knee-deep water. Dadamashai was still carping at nameless visitors.

"Who can tell if somebody entered when incessant rain was pouring in the garden and we were shut indoors. How could the durwans keep watch on such a day? The tamarind tree, preserved for so long, is gone at last."

We all searched for it, the gardeners did too. But all was in vain. Nowhere could it be found; and therefore, it was accepted that the old tamarind tree, reared with so much care by Dadamashai, was stolen.

At last it was discovered in the quiet corner of the glass-house. The man who kept it there presented it to Dadamashai out of a sense of duty. The following is the story in the background. While wandering in the garden in the rain a servant of the house saw that the condition of Dadamashai's favourite tree was critical. Pushed by the gushing rains it fell from the stone-built platform in the middle of the fountain and was half-sunk in water. To save it from being ruined he placed it carefully in the glass-house. It remained quite well there, only that the man who saved the tree did not at all think that he should have informed somebody about this.

"See the cleverness of the dolt!" Saying this Dadamashai was full of rapture getting his missing tree back.

This tamarind tree was once installed on the wooden stand in the eastern railing of the southern veranda. At that time there was a student of Dadamashai's in our house. One day Dadamashai asked him to draw a picture of the tamarind tree.

He was a good painter and we liked his drawing. The whole day with colour and brush like a devoted rotary, he worked sitting before the bonsai tamarind tree.

In the evening, drying the wet picture, he took it to Dadamashai who was then reading Dickens's *Bleak House*. Dadamashai said, "Who can see the colour of a picture in the evening? Come at daytime."

The student was going back, but after a bit of musing Dadamashai called him and said, "Well, let me see."

He closed *Bleak House*, put it aside and taking the picture in his hand remarked, "Ah, see! Where is the tamarind tree? You have drawn only the tub."

The student had actually painted the tree as he saw it planted on the tub.

Dadamashai said, "I asked you to draw the tree. How could you paint the tub? Perhaps you have not seen my tree at all. Is my tree that small? You should have thought about the age of the tree when you attempted to draw its picture. What exactly have you been seeing – the tub or the tree?"

"Yes, sir, I had been looking at the tree as well as the tub."

"Who told you to look at the tub? Haven't you read the story of Arjun hitting the mark? Go through it if you haven't. Had you looked at the tree alone, it would have grown big in size, while you yourself would have grown small. Then you could have realized how very old are its branches – you could have clearly guessed its age. Come, let me give a few touches to your picture to set it right."

Saying this, Dadamashai rose with the picture in his hand, went to the southern veranda where he used to paint pictures and, with folded legs, sat on his chair. A pair of scissors was brought out of the drawer. Nearly half of the tub he cut off sharply and the rest he mixed with the soil covering it with colour. Then he said to the student, "Go and stand by that railing. I'll draw you as very small." Saying this he painted him as standing obediently under the tamarind tree – a traveller sheltered under a huge tree. He also painted just a bit of the sky.

He went on, "It's a tree of olden times; unaccountable is its age. Did you want to prove your cleverness? See, I've turned you into a small old man."

Giving the picture back to his student, Dadamashai said, "Perhaps you see the sunrise every morning. From tomorrow you'll see the sunrise sitting over there. Your eyes have to be trained. The day on

which you'll tell me that you have seen the sunrise sitting under the tamarind tree, I'll allow you to paint pictures, and not before that."

Then, Dadamashai took up Dickens's *Bleak House* again and began to read it with attention.

It is a natural question to ask whether the method of the present invention can be used to identify the presence of a particular gene in a cell or tissue sample. The answer is yes, and the following example illustrates the use of the present invention to identify the presence of a particular gene in a cell or tissue sample.

and I think, in a short time, with the other members of the party, he will be in a position to do a great deal of good.

## *Chapter 16*

Dadamashai had a special virtue. He never read the newspaper. We saw that everyone read the newspaper, some a good deal and others quite little. But everyone at least glanced over it, but Dadamashai never touched one. He used to say, "It's no good reading the news. There is no pleasure in it; it is better to hear the news from others." He knew the world by listening to news from the mouths of other people.

Early in the morning Punnababu used to come from the Saha house to our southern veranda on the first floor. Punnababu's daily ration was a bowl of tobacco in a hookah with a large roundish water container made of coconut shell. With the entrance of Punnababu, a bearer put a bowl full of burning cinders on his hookah. He took the hookah in one hand, in another the newspaper and sat with his back towards the garden. Punnababu was the first reader of the newspaper in our house. Once he was the demonstrator of botany in Bangabasi College. He was much interested in trees and plants, and he had great knowledge about these. When we saw him he had already retired from service. He was then a daily visitor to Jorasanko. He was an opium eater. We saw him dozing with the hookah in one hand and in another the newspaper flung open. He could not read it but Mejdadamashai was waiting for Punnababu to read it to all. His pleasant drug-stupor was disturbed by fascinating stories. We often found Punnababu and Mejdadamashai discussing plants, trees and gardening. When Mejdadamashai finished reading the newspaper, others in the house could have access to it. In fact, every morning all the news were discussed in the southern veranda. Dadamashai came to know all the printed news without ever lifting his eyes from painting.

When an aeroplane flew for the first time in the Calcutta sky, it was Punnababu who informed Dadamashai about it. What excitement! An aeroplane which no one had set eyes on, but seen only in pictures, would be flying over the city. That piece of news was read at several times and studied thoroughly to know when the aeroplane would arrive and where it would land. Finally when the

aeroplane arrived, all the inmates of the house stayed on the rooftop from early morning. Looking constantly at the sky their eyes ached. A tiny dot appeared at last in the northern sky. Gradually the dot grew in size and then a giant groaned and flew above our heads. It was a small two-seater plane. At that time even that seemed like a flying giant. After that, for ten to twelve days Punnababu had to read out news about the aeroplane every day.

Punnababu gave Dadamashai many such news reports as those of earthquakes, floods and famine, news about governors, the opening of a railway bridge on the river Padma, a white elephant's arrival at the zoo, buildings that rose taller than the Monument in Calcutta and the inauguration of the Victoria Memorial. For a long time we had seen him supplying news to Dadamashai and excellent trees to Mejdadamashai. Then all on a sudden Punnababu passed away.

Meanwhile Kshitish appeared in our Jorasanko family. He had no specific work to do. He did some odd jobs in the house; and when plays were performed and many cars assembled, it was his pleasure to control the crowd of cars and direct their movement. In the evening he managed to get a newspaper from somewhere and read it out to Dadamashai. Kshitish filled the vacuum caused by the death of Punnababu. There was, however, a little difference. Kshitish's time was evening and then he used to read the Bengali newspaper instead of English. Both these changes, I believe, were more to Dadamashai's liking.

Kshitish said one day, "My family business is Ayurvedic system of treatment. I would like to make hair oil. Babamashai! Please suggest a name for it."

Dadamashai replied, "You want to make oil? Ayurvedic oil? Well then, name it 'Alokananda'!"

In a few days Kshitish bought utensils like a pot and tumbler, oil, spices, essence and colour and made a real factory in his room. He also procured a rubber stamp which when pasted read like this:

#### Alokananda Hair Oil

Name conferred by Dr Sri Abanindra Nath Tagore, C.I.E.

*This oil, when applied, cools the brain and helps the growth of hair.*

Price: Twelve annas per bottle.

One morning Kshitish put this stamp on numerous pieces of paper and took those to Dadamashai. Dadamashai was astounded. He said, "What have you done, Kshitish? Am I Dr. C.I.E.? If people become mad applying that crazy oil of yours, they will blame me. It seems I am in the soup now trying to provide your oil with a name."

Kshitish was not to be subdued. Softening overmuch he said smilingly, "Sir, I'll insert a handbill inside the package of every bottle and also a certificate of yours."

"I've not used your hair oil – not even set eyes on it. How can you think of a certificate? Oh! Mohanlal! Mohanlal! Come sharp! What a bother?" He began to shout calling my name.

I came running. Kshitish still went on, "Sir, I'll smear oil with my own hand onto your head. Please, write the certificate or none will buy my oil."

"Mohanlal! Bring a piece of paper."

I offered a piece of paper and Dadamashai wrote quite a fair certificate in favour of Alokanda Hair Oil. Then he bade me to bring *Ritusamhar*<sup>1</sup> of Kalidasa and copy a few lines of poetry about the description of the seasons beginning from summer up to spring. I copied several lines describing all the seasons.

"Put these in the handbill of Kshitish. Let this certificate of Kalidasa state that this oil is applicable in all seasons. In that case my certificate may evade the notice of others."

Thus the hair oil of Kshitish's was publicised.

One evening an over-excited Kshitish came to the *majlis* of Dadamashai with a four-page newspaper and said, "See, Babamashai, they have written about my oil."

Dadamashai said, "Let me see. I hope they won't arrest me?"

Now Kshitish showed what was written. It stated, "We are very happy to receive a bottle of Alokanda Hair Oil much praised by Dr. Abanindranath Tagore..." etc.

Dadamashai's face was beaming with a smile. He asked Kshitish, "How much did you spend to get this news published?"

Scratching his head Kshitish said, "Sir, I didn't require money at all. I only had to mention your name."

"Is that so? Are they going to send a bill in my name?"

"No, Sir, I told them that you will send your composition to their

<sup>1</sup> *Ritusamhar* – a long poem by Kalidasa on the seasons

newspaper."

Again he shouted, "Oh Mohanlal! Mohanlal! Come here. See what Kshitish has done!"

Hearing everything, I said, "If the editor of the newspaper now asks for your write up, you cannot avoid it. You are bound to send one."

At that time Kshitish used to read out to Dadamashai select news reports that appeared in the newspaper about Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement on the one hand and the terrorist movement on the other. If there was any incredible, cock-and-bull story, Kshitish would be very happy and read that first. It was no doubt news as it was set in printed words. Besides these he read the news of football matches. But regarding this news Kshitish had a special ability to differentiate between the football clubs. Kshitish was Dhaka's 'Bangal'<sup>2</sup>. If the East Bengal Club won a game, he read the news aloud sitting at the feet of Dadamashai. But if Mohun Bagan came out victorious, he would just ignore it. If one of us brought the news stealthily to Dadamashai's ears, he used to ask, "Oh Kshitish, why didn't you tell me the news of football today?"

Pretending that he did not hear him, Kshitish promptly said, "Sir, here is the news of an old lady who died falling in a well. Let me read it out." Then he began to read in detail the news of the death of an old lady. The topic of football wouldn't come up again.

The political movement of our country had then come to such a state that the government banned all native newspapers.

Dadamashai said, "What a fix! No news can be had at a time when it is most needed. Oh! Kshitish! What can be done? How are we to pass our time? See Kshitish, something must have happened to this side of my foot. It is swollen and causing pain."

Pressing the spot Kshitish said, "Sir, it seems like a poisonous boil. Some medicine has to be applied."

"Do you know of any Ayurvedic medicine?"

"Yes, I do. Let me arrange for it at once."

"No, no! You need not do anything. Inform the doctor and ask him to attend to it tomorrow."

Kshitish was disappointed as the Ayurvedic treatment was not

<sup>2</sup> *Bangal* – the people of East Bengal formerly used to be so called by the people of West Bengal because of the peculiar form of their spoken language

accepted. The doctor said that the boil was of a crooked kind and was to be cured slowly, splitting it by means of medication and applying a dressing carefully.

Hearing this, Kshitish got much encouraged and took the whole responsibility of nursing Dadamashai.

Some time passed in the treatment of the boil. Its pain increased. It was made to suppurate, and then it was operated on. It was washed and dressed, and upon the bandage being unfastened, the opening of the boil was cleaned with boiled water and medicine. Then further a bandage was made with cotton and medicine. All this Dadamashai went through twice daily for about an hour with the help of Kshitish. They did a lot of experiments regarding the bandage. They used to discuss such medical practices as how to bind the bandage so that movement would be easier although it would not slip or how to bind it so that blood circulation would not be hampered.

At last when the boil was cured, the dressing was not necessary anymore. Getting sorely disappointed, Dadamashai said, "For so long time has been passing quite smoothly. What shall I do now? Kshitish! What to do?"

The newspaper had been banned and in addition, treatment of the boil was also over. Kshitish himself was quite depressed.

Didima became furious. She said, "How can you say that! I've promised to offer sweets to Lord Hari if the boil is cured. Do you want to have another boil?"

That day in the evening Kshitish entered Dadamashai's room rather mysteriously, and staring oddly here and there he dropped at Dadamashai's feet with a thud. Then lifting his *punjabi* he brought out some dirty, folded pieces of paper from the pocket of his waistcoat and whispered to Dadamashai, "I've brought a banned newspaper for you." A startled Dadamashai cried, "Banned! What do you mean by banned?"

"Yes sir, the newspaper having been closed, these have been published by the Congress. I've also bought the paper of the bomb squad. Those are better still."

"What misfortune! Do you want me to get arrested? Wherefrom have you managed to get all these? Do you also belong to that group? Get rid of these at once. Get these off."

"See, there is interesting news." Saying this Kshitish began to

read out the most thrilling news without paying heed to Dadamashai's protest. Among these stories some were about the inhuman torture by the British and some were about the revolutionary parties who planned as to how to put an end to the British Empire. Whatever be the stories, hearing them Dadamashai found great pleasure.

From then on as long as the ban on the publication of newspapers was not lifted, Kshitish managed to bring secret and forbidden hand-printed bulletins of different political parties and read them out to Dadamashai. Listening to those news items, Dadamashai laughed a good deal.

"Kshitish has made me addicted to an extreme craving," Dadamashai used to say. "All the while I tremble in fear, but I cannot resist it."

## *Chapter 17*

Kshitish expected that selling Alokananda Hair Oil he would grow rich. But that could not be. In the beginning Kshitish was full of zeal. He thought his business would flourish because of the power of Kalidasa's 'sloka' and Dadamashai's certificate. His oil was not bad. Its colour and smell were quite good and it cooled the head. In addition it was cheap. At first the shops readily accepted eighty to ninety bottles of oil. It came to be known that it was also selling well. Kshitish came and informed Dadamashai with an expansive smile, "Sir, with your blessing...it mustn't be said...but...eh...my business is doing well." He said this with a mouthful of smile. We thought the name of Alokananda would be heard everywhere in the market like Jabakusum, Lakshmibilash and Kesharanjan. Alokananda would now be sounded and resounded in every mouth. When Kshitish went to the shops and the markets with the second lot of oil, he was shocked to see that though willing to buy his oil, they were not much interested in its marketing. Some said, "Call at the end of the month." Others said, "Come later." Kshitish had no experience of this side of the business of oil – the difficulty involved in the realization of money, the harassment one had to face – for all these Kshitish came to have a quite bitter experience. At last, one day he disclosed the whole truth to Dadamashai. He said, "Babamashai, my business can't be run any more. Creditors have almost ruined me, whereas the realisation of money is almost nil."

Dadamashai said, "Then, you have been undone. The proverb says, 'If you touch the pot, you must touch the penny.' Perhaps this proverb is not in vogue in your part of the country. How come that you do not know it though you have come to trade in oil?"

Kshitish accepted that he never heard this good counsel.

Dadamashai then took an account of Kshitish's debt. It was found that on account of raw spices etc., he had a debt of about sixty to seventy rupees.

Dadamashai said, "I've gone through a lot of trouble since I suggested the name of the oil. How do I save myself from this burden of debt? I thought the boy would be well established by selling oil.

Now I see that not only his debt but he himself will be my burden."

Saying this Dadamashai paid off all his debt and said, "So your business is over. Since you have nothing to do now, massage my legs."

Kshitish began to massage Dadamashai's legs.

One evening while massaging, Kshitish said, "Babamashai, I have been terribly afraid of ghosts."

Dadamashai asked with surprise, "How is it, Kshitish? Where have you found ghosts?"

"Sir, the cash-room of your forefathers is next to my room. The ghost is exactly there."

"What's in the cash-room of my forefathers? Has the ghost got in there?"

"Yes Sir."

The cutchery room was on the ground floor, towards the west of the swing garden – just like a long slice. In the corner of that room there were rows of wooden racks stacked with many old records, documents and deeds. Through the openings and chinks of those racks, rats moved about freely. Towards the end of the rainy season cockroaches filled its dark corners. No one ever handled those documents of the record-office of the zamindars. This cutchery room extended up to the northwest corner of the garden. Close to it the first room in the north belonged to Kshitish. We had seen in our early childhood that this room was the Litho printing press of Dadamashai. Huge pieces of stone were kept in a corner of the room and the Litho Press was in the middle. Those pieces of stone were made smooth by rubbing. Pictures were transferred to each stone and different colours were strewn on them. We would stare in amazement when pictures of three or four colours came out of them. And if one or two half-torn pictures fell into our hands, we ran at once to our room. Dadamashai himself helped in printing pictures on those Litho stones. In this Litho Press were printed Bardadamashai's cartoon books *Advootlok* and *Birupbajra*. Long after the printing press was closed down, the room came under the charge of Kshitish. The cash-room was just next to it. There was a time when revenue from the estate was really stored in this room. The room was surrounded by thick iron bars. The door was protected by iron bars set on an iron frame and a big lock was hung from it. When revenue would be

stored in the room, a watchman would stand on guard with a muzzleloader in hand. That practice is long over. Money is insured nowadays instead of being sent in loaded boxes by boat or rail. We had not seen such practices; nor was it known to us how long ago before our birth the real use of that room was stopped. However, the room was still called the cash-room. Now it served the purpose of a godown. It contained the furniture of the dining room of Dwarakanath's time — chandelier and crockeries made of glass and porcelain. All these materials remained under lock and key, and no one ever opened them. "Does Kshitish say there is a ghost in that room," Dadamashai said. "How did you come to know of it, eh?"

"Sir! I hear noises at dead of night."

"What noise?"

"Somebody tries to break the iron doors."

"How is it possible?"

"A clattering sound is heard. For so long I didn't tell you. But as my fear is increasing, I had to tell you."

Dadamashai summoned us all. Then he said, "Listen to it. A mysterious thing is happening in the ground floor cash-room. Kshitish says that it is a ghost. He is almost dead for fear." Then he asked, "Can't it be a thief? Who knows if any treasure of Dwarakanath was not hidden underneath? Thieves must have got a hint of it. It may be a ghost too. Who can tell? It may also be a bandit ghost of those days."

Hearing all, we found the affair to be quite thrilling. Letting our fancy roam, we began to construct innumerable pictures in our minds. Dadamashai himself began to speculate, "The thieves must have come to know of the cash-room. Digging a channel beneath the building, they must have been trying to enter the cash-room. The strokes of the pickaxe made Kshitish think of the ghost."

Such was the practice of building old houses that there were vaulted creeks under the ground floor from one end of the building to the other. In that creek moved mongooses, polecats and perhaps a few iguanas. Although it was quite difficult to believe that a burglar, getting into the channel, could pierce through the ground and enter the cash-room, it was easy to imagine delightfully how it all happened in the pleasant evenings of Jorasanko House. However, there remains a question. Why should the thieves take so much trouble to enter the

cash-room? What allures them? There was no suitable answer. Maybe they are tempted by some hidden treasure known only to Dwarakanath. But to get access to that hidden treasure, the soil has to be dug from above; it is not necessary to make a channel under the earth. These controversial debates led to the decision that if Kshitish heard any clattering sound that must have been made by the ghosts and if those be really thieves, they must be ghosts of thieves.

Dadamashai said to Kshitish, "Henceforth, if you hear any sound at midnight, just call us. We will go and see what it is."

Kshitish replied, "Sir, I shall be in the ground floor, while you will be above. If I call you over much they will escape, be they ghosts or thieves."

After a lot of deliberation, a decision was made. There was a bathroom beneath the southern window of Dadamashai's room. The place, being surrounded on all sides, was quite secluded. Kshitish was to come out secretly to the bathroom whenever he heard the ghosts. There a rope would be hung from Dadamashai's room. Kshitish would wake up all by striking the bell bound to the top of the rope without making much noise.

There was a brazen bell in the school that was once found in our house that used to be placed on the table of the master. He used to ring the bell when the school started and when it closed. That bell came to our use. We took it to Dadamashai's bedroom, tied it to a rope, placed it by the window of the bathroom and hung it down. Kshitish was not sure if the ghosts came every night. But it was decided that if the clattering sound was heard on that night, Kshitish would come and pull the rope.

That night with palpitating hearts we went to bed. Dadamashai said, "Be careful. It is the cash-room of Dwarakanath Tagore and no one else's. No one knows what is in that room. Let us see what comes out."

Because of excitement, sleep was not easy to come. Then, thinking of a variety of things, we didn't know when we fell asleep. We knew not what time of night it was when in the midst of sleep we heard Dadamashai's voice, "Wake up – Kshitish has pulled the bell."

Hurriedly and busily we all woke up. Then secretly and stealthily we reached Dadamashai's room. Didima, who had already awakened, said, "Please, don't go alone. Take Charitra with you." Both the cash-

room and Kshitish's room could be seen from the eastern window of Dadamashai's room. Peeping through the window we felt as if, in the faint moonlight and darkness, the veranda of the ground floor and its rounded pillars were enveloped in an eerie suspense. Just then, a clattering sound was heard from the direction of the cash-room and set a shiver into our very bones.

Kshitish, rope in hand, was still standing in the bathroom. Once more he pulled at the rope. We went towards the window of the bathroom on tiptoe and whispered to Kshitish that we had heard, "Be ready, we are coming."

Charitra stood prepared with a short but fat staff. Each of us also took some kind of stick or staff. Then, barefooted, we went slowly down to the ground floor in the dark. Dadamashai also followed us with his crooked stick in hand. When we reached close to the bathroom, once again the clattering sound was heard.

Dadamashai said, "Charitra! Go ahead and see what it is."

Charitra was quite bold. He went fast to the cutchery room and peeped into it. Nothing like a shadowy figure or something else could be seen at the door of the cash-room.

Then, gathering courage, we all advanced together on tiptoe. At last we stood near the cash-room. Just then we heard the clattering sound once again – this time louder, still frightening us all. In fear we stood close to each other. There was no doubt about it that the sound was coming from the cash-room. What calamity! Are there men inside? Are they breaking something with a pickaxe? How could they enter the room? A lock was still tied to the iron door. Had they really entered, digging a channel? Or is the whole thing a ghostly affair? All these questions occurred in everyone's mind.

It was decided that the lock of the cash-room would be opened. Somebody was going to light a lamp. Dadamashai stopped him saying, "Then the ghost will escape."

Making no noise and with no light, slowly we opened the rusty lock. Just then the whole cash-room seemed to shiver at that clattering sound. Becoming afraid, we moved back. All of a sudden Dadamashai lit up a matchstick. Through the open door we saw a big rat flying away, dragging its long tail through the open door leading to Dwarakanath's almirah containing crockeries. Kshitish, Charitra and a third person entered the room. Lighting a match we

found that there were two other big rats in the almirah of utensils. Dwarakanath's dinner-set glistened as we opened the almirah, driving the rats away. There were still bright new things brought from Dresden and Mycene in olden times. Heavy plates were lifted and dropped by the rats, generating a clattering sound like that of the breaking of iron doors. This was the matter then!

We had a lot of fun. Then Dadamashai said, "Don't think this was something ordinary and commonplace. Dwarakanath's plates – what a noise they make! They have dragged out of their sleep all the inmates of the house."

The masters of the house had almost forgotten the glassware full of fine artistry and chinaware of Dresden and Mycene. No one had in mind that such treasure was lying in dust in that dark, gloomy and dirty room. Next day the utensils were brought out, washed and wiped and taken to the second-floor veranda before the three Dadamashais. Looking at the property of their forefathers, they were very happy. It was decided that instead of leaving those treasures in the cash-room, they would be used for adorning the rooms of the three brothers so they could often make use of them. Being distributed among the three Dadamashais, they were taken to their rooms.

Thus the ghostly disturbance of the cash-room came to an end. It is difficult to say why the rats went crazy with the plates. Nor is it known how many grand dinner parties were arranged by Dwarakanath in his lifetime. Maybe the smell of the dainty food was still coming out of them. Had they not been wiped away? Who can tell?

## Chapter 18

Dadamashai's chef Talabali once went home, never to return. News came that he had died. The man who used to cook for them in their youth was called Nabin. He was a very expert chef. We had never seen him, but the stories we had heard about his cooking left us agape. Talabali was Nabin's mate. Learning from Nabin and applying his own intelligence, Talabali could cook a few *Moghlai*<sup>1</sup> and European dishes. That was why Talabali was appointed as a chef after Nabin.

We used to ask Dadamashai, "You have tasted Nabin's cooking and Talabali's too. Who do you think is a better cook?"

Dadamashai said, "Talabali is no parallel to Nabin. He was a great cook." He added, "Nabin was a chef fit for grand parties. Inviting a lot of men, adorning the room, laying a cover on the table, placing cutlery on it, Nabin made it all so pompous that those who came to have their meals could taste the real flavour of Nabin's cooking. Those days are gone; those customs have long passed away. If you want to have your dinner at home, to roll up the sleeves to your elbows and relish the Moghlai cooking or an English dish, it is better to have Talabali's preparations."

Radhu was Talabali's friend. He was not a mate of Talabali, nor did he learn cooking from him. In the evening Radhu used to stand at the kitchen with Dadamashai's plate and other utensils in hand. Talabali handed over to him a bowl of chicken stew and a dish full of pudding. Radhu carried them to Dadamashai's dining room. This came to be stopped after Talabali's death. Besides the chef, we had also a Brahmin cook; of course that was in another building where yellow pigeon-pea, a dish of bitter vegetables and rich curry of fish, was cooked in the native manner. Food from both the kitchens was brought for Dadamashai. It was not that he disliked the preparation of *thakur*<sup>2</sup>, but he did not like to take all day the food prepared by the Brahmin following the traditional Bengali recipes. He was not satisfied

<sup>1</sup> *Moghlai* – Moghlai cuisine originated from the kitchens of the Mogul Empire.

<sup>2</sup> *thakur* – a Brahmin cook

if in the evening a few items made by the *baburchi*<sup>3</sup> were not added to the Brahmin's preparation. Therefore, Dadamashai was in trouble when Talabali went away.

Radhu was a very alert servant. Readily he took in the whole business and began to cook for Dadamashai following the foreign recipes. Though a new hand in cooking, soon Radhu began to cook in Talabali's style. Coming to Talabali frequently and for a long time, Radhu learnt Moghlai cooking.

Then one day when Radhu came and said that he could not make the orange jelly that Talabali used to make, one half of which looked white and the other red, Dadamashai was highly encouraged. "Wait, I will teach you how to make orange-bloom," he said.

*Cookery Book* by Mrs. Beeton was brought out of the almirah, and it was known that what Radhu called jelly was in fact two-coloured cornflower pudding frozen in ice. Radhu learnt it promptly.

After this incident the idea of cooking entered Dadamashai's mind. The library produced more books on cookery. He began to read about cooking, gathering books on cooking in Bengali and buying Muslim cookery books. The book on 'Thousand Things' was bought in which there was a chapter on cooking. He used to read it to Radhu and tell him how one step was to follow another. Often he himself went to the kitchen to see how the cooking was in progress. In fact Radhu came to be under Dadamashai's training and gradually he became an expert cook. The vacuum that was caused by Talabali's absence was now compensated by Radhu.

Once again we asked the old question to Dadamashai, "Do you think Radhu cooks like Talabali, or is he much better?" Dadamashai's reply was the same as before. He said, "Talabali was a chef while Radhu is just a lad from Bistupur. However, he has adapted his cooking to my tastes quite well."

Further he said, "Whoever cooks, he will cook in his own fashion. It's a wonderful thing. They follow their own choice and taste instead of following others. However much he learns from his master, his own style is sure to come out. Perhaps he cooks for other people; maybe he is cooking for a great feast making use of all sorts of utensils, but he is really doing it for himself according to his own choice. Cooking itself will be a failure if his mind is not there. This is

<sup>3</sup> *baburchi* – a Muslim cook

the speciality of a good cook. Radhu belongs to this group like Talabali and Nabin."

No one else gave Radhu such a grand certificate.

Then Dadamashai suggested, "Let us start a class for cooking. You will be the learners. You will see that each of you will be preparing a new kind of dish. Everyone will cook one's own dish."

It was difficult for us to believe that learning cooking we would be expert cooks. It was almost unimaginable that after being cooked, green vegetables would turn into tasteful eatables. However, being encouraged we arranged everything. None of us even knew how to light an oven with cow-dung cakes. Considering that it was better to learn cooking without smoke and soot, we had brought a kerosene stove. Our cookery class was opened in the southern veranda on the ground floor close to the rocking garden. Our first lesson began with the whizzing sound of the stove when the western sky of Jorasanko above the mango tree was getting red in the sunset glow. Dadamashai said, "On the first day there will be only fried potato. Cut potatoes into pieces according to your choice."

We cut potatoes into wheel-shapes, thin pieces, round, fine or thick. Oh! What a variety of fried potatoes was made on that day! Frying of some made them hard and dry, some soft, some crisp, others too crisp. Some of us fried potatoes in the native way; some made English chips while others had potato 'sauté' in the French fashion. They were of diverse colours – golden, dark brown, yellow or white. It was a fair of various sorts of fried potatoes – so delicious to taste. Fried potatoes filled our stomachs in such a way that the dinners of most of us were wasted.

Dadamashai did not think of this before. It was found that our daily meals were wasted if we attended the cookery class. Those who were in charge of preparing our daily meals so that we had proper nutrition required for our health objected. Therefore, though the cookery class began with great enthusiasm, it did not continue for long.

By that time Dadamashai came to be intoxicated with cooking. He had taught Radhu, had given some lessons to us and had prepared a few novel items. Therefore, he could not stop. He began to make a variety of experiments getting into the kitchen with Radhu. Peeping there we often had the smell of cooking and our mouths watered. Often he reversed the timeworn methods of cooking, so that where

the onion was to be fried in the beginning he used to do it at the end. Where the cooking material was to be singed at the end, he would singe fish and vegetable at the outset. Instead of boiling he would fry or vice versa. The adverse result of these reversals of procedure he would face by developing new processes. He would do many more such things. In this way he had created chicken-cum-fish broth and fish-cum-chicken curry.

When Dadamashai was thus stirred up with the subject of cooking, the children of our house were thinking of forming a club. Many such clubs were formed and dissolved in the Tagore House. Clubs were formed by them and their neighbours often with some purpose in view and more often with no purpose at all. The novelty of this time's attempt was that though it had no distinct purpose, it was thought that its president would be conspicuous by his presence. Poet Jasimuddin offered his name as a candidate. Since there was no other candidate, Jasimuddin was hopeful of being elected. Members of the club informed that they would not vote for Jasimuddin if they were not offered a sumptuous feast. Jasimuddin was, therefore, highly worried as to what food would satisfy the children of the Tagore House.

Jasimuddin said, "See, I belong to the village. I am a rustic poet. I cannot offer you food fit for a king. You have to be satisfied with whatever I offer you."

All of us agreed.

Jasimuddin then went to the market with some of us. He bought excellent *ghee*<sup>4</sup>, oil, sugar, *suji*<sup>5</sup>, potato, brinjal, raisin, nuts, curd and *sandesh*<sup>6</sup> so that the purchase, though not like a royal house, was quite considerable.

Then the cooking began. All of us attempted to offer some help. Radhu came once and gave us some suggestions as to what to do. The veranda of Jorasanko House was filled with the smell of cooking. The cooking ended – all came to sit with their plates and they were happy to fill their stomach. But when it was time to cast their vote, no one turned up. They all seemed to be reluctant. What happened? The feast was quite good, but there was nothing special. Anyone

<sup>4</sup> *ghee* – clarified butter

<sup>5</sup> *suji* – coarse flour or wheat

<sup>6</sup> *sandesh* – dry sweetmeat made of cottage cheese and sugar or molasses

could offer such a feast. It was not as good as to make Jasimuddin the president of the children's club of Jorasanko House.

What a pitiable person Jasimuddin seemed to be! What a result for his labour and waste of money! Is it so hard to please the children of the Tagores?

Dadamashai saw Jasimuddin wandering with a wry face. He said, "Well Jasimuddin! You have offered a feast to all. Why not to me?"

Jasimuddin replied, "Dadamashai, this treat was only for the children."

Dadamashai said, "Yes, I know. But I hear that your money has been wasted. Why so?"

Jasimuddin then disclosed all to him and added, "Dadamashai, it is hard to please the wards of your house."

"Is it so? What were the items?"

Jasimuddin supplied a long list.

"What were the things you purchased? Have they all been exhausted?"

"No, Sir. Do I know the estimate of cooking items? There's much in excess."

"Well. Let me see the surplus. Bring them here."

When Jasimuddin came back with the excess items, Dadamashai said, "Tell them that tomorrow there will be another feast. I shall be cooking with all these surplus items. Nothing will be wasted, not a bit of it. Announce that they will be offered 'Josy kabab'<sup>7</sup> tomorrow."

This raised great excitement. Josy kabab! What was that? We all became expectant for the Josy kabab of Jasimuddin.

Next day Dadamashai began to cook with the excess suji, nuts and the rest. We remained waiting while the kabab was being prepared – Josy kabab!

At last all of us stood in a row with an earthen bowl in hand. Each of us was given a piece of hot Josy kabab. Not more than that could be had. To us that kabab seemed excellent. After this no one objected to vote for Jasimuddin.

Never again Dadamashai's Josy kabab was prepared. How could he? Its recipe could not be found in any cookery book. No one remembers the number of items and the measures used in it. It was prepared only once, and as a result Jasimuddin came to be elected.

<sup>7</sup> kabab – roasted meat

## *Chapter 19*

We were just kids when the stairs of Jorasanko House were wrapped in carpet at the arrival of the Governor or some high official. Perhaps sudden news appeared that Lord Carmichael or Ronaldshay would come to meet the Dadamashais at 3 p.m. The main interest of these visits was to see the pictures recently painted, to gossip and to discuss, when necessary, about the Indian Society of Oriental Arts. Sahibs of those days were appreciative of fine arts. They knew the value of precious works of art and that of fresh works of living artists personally known to them. They considered it as a rare fortune.

Among the Governor Generals, Lord Redding and Lord Montague often visited the House. Lord Montague was so fascinated on seeing Dadamashai's picture 'Shah Jahan's Death' that he could not turn his eyes from it. Being asked about its price, Dadamashai said, "That picture is not for sale. It has become a family property. But don't worry, Sahib. I shall paint a copy of the same picture for you." The original picture was painted in oil. But at that time Dadamashai was getting skilled in watercolour, and therefore, he copied it in watercolour. That picture of Shah Jahan in watercolour was exceedingly successful. Many of those who saw it said that it was even better than the original. That picture was taken to the sahib's own country and preserved among his personal collection with care. That was the only occasion when Dadamashai created a copy of his own picture – never afterwards.

At the news of the arrival of such important guests, the house would be stirred. The huge wooden staircase was brightened by repeated rubbing and then it was wrapped in a carpet. The palm tree in the tub was dragged out of the glass-house. The tubs were brushed clean and placed under the stair beside the main gate. The library room was swept as the sahibs used to sit there. We, the children, had been ordered not to tread those quarters, nor to make a noise. We tried to peep inquisitively and saw the Dadamashais putting on long overcoats. In the library room, on a low table, was kept a box of Burma cheroots. Newly painted pictures by Dadamashai and Bardadamashai were placed in a corner under paper covers. A south

Indian image of *Nataraj*<sup>1</sup> in black bronze was brought down from the top of the almirah and placed in the front. Nowadays, we find cheap brass-made Nataraj adorning the houses, but in those days only the Dadamashais knew its value. They had collected from somewhere a faultless dancing Nataraj.

After the arrival of the sahib guests, we were never allowed to go to the corner where they were seated. However, when they left we entered that part of the house which was decorated and embellished. It seemed so pleasing to play hide-and-seek behind the palm tree or simply to sit on the carpeted stair. Then we got into the library room in the evening. A little decoration made the everyday library room completely new. The Dadamashais furnished the library room according to their taste. It was done by two artisans – the Japanese Kasahara and the South Indian Acharya. A mingling of these two different styles of artistry gradually contributed to the library room's new look. Dadamashai instructed Acharya to make the low cot, chair, table and almirah in conformity with their own design, while Kasahara was to cover the walls with cool and soothing mat set on the wooden frame. The floor was covered with a long wooden frame woven with cane instead of embroidered mattresses or carpet. There were placed on it a few wood rests and dumpy bolsters to lean against. Such a great comfort it was to lie on them in summer. To decorate the room in such novel and native fashion was the Dadamashais' own. The sahibs of good taste who used to come to the Jorasanko House liked the ambience of our library room. Although they would be invited to the houses of great kings and emperors in India, perhaps they never came across such ostentatious yet refined and original ideas in the decoration of a house. Long afterwards when Kattababa began to adorn and furnish *Uttarayan*<sup>2</sup>, he was inspired by the library room of the Dadamashais – its furniture, wall, floor, dumpy bolsters, pillows – everything.

We did not know why the room was called the library room. Nor did we ever ask why it was so called. When we saw it there was no library, but we heard that there was a library long before our time. To the north there was a bathroom covering one third of the room. In the rest of the southern part there was a well-decorated library of the

<sup>1</sup> *Nataraj* – Shiva in a dancing posture

<sup>2</sup> *Uttarayan* – the name of a house in Santiniketan

father of our Dadamashais. The room was designed in the European style. The bathroom was demolished and in its place was built a big hall with the south and north open. To embellish it in the native fashion, they employed Kasahara and Acharya. The almirah and books of the library were sent to other rooms. When Kattababa opened the *Bichitra Club*<sup>3</sup> in the red house, the library of the Dadamashais was shifted there.

There was a small corner under the window that was built by the Dadamashais, on the eastern wall of the library room. There was a wooden seat round that corner. After the departure of the sahibs we used to sit there. Close to the window it resembled a seat in a railway compartment. Through the round window could be seen the huge *sisoo* tree. Its huge trunk rising a little from the ground seemed to spread its two arms on its two sides. In between the two the moon appeared in the eastern sky. The branches of the tree between the two arms that the Dadamashais made Kasahara cut off to broaden the sky for the moon to come out were smoothened and polished and placed by the side of the bench near the round window. For us it was great delight to peep into the eastern sky sitting on the wooden seat of the *sisoo* tree.

Long after when the Dadamashais' house at Puri was sold off and the Jorasanko House had no longer its former pomp and grandeur, we heard that somebody was coming to our house. Not a governor or somebody like that, but quite an important and respectable person. At that time Dukhi Behara was put in charge of the carpets. With a glum face he came and said to the Dadamashais, "Sirs, the carpets covering the stairs have been torn and eaten by rats." Hearing this Dadamashai looked sullen. All knew that if such a huge carpet had been torn, it would not be possible to buy another. Gradually from month to month, year to year, the affluence of the Jorasanko House was dwindling. The Dadamashais knew it at heart, but they liked to put it out of their minds. Nor would they discuss it much. Loss of the carpet, announced so abruptly, made them aware of the emptiness of their former glamour and glory. However, Dadamashai said, "It's quite good that the carpet is torn. Only dust accumulated in it. Let people see now the wonderful wooden staircase of our house."

<sup>3</sup> *Bichitra Club* – an organization established by the Tagores for the purpose of exploring new styles of painting and printmaking

Then he went near the staircase and on top of it towards the north placed quite a big image of Ganesha.

What wonder! At once the very appearance of the staircase was transformed. That single Ganesha compensated for the loss of the carpet.

The carpets, rugs and chandeliers of Dwarakanath – all went to rack and ruin for lack of care and were dumped into the godown. The mirrors and lamps departed by and by. However, the library room still remained for us. Still it contained beautiful and strong wooden furniture – Acharya's handwork, the round window bound by a thick cane frame set on the eastern corner and its deep interior adorned with bench and stool. On the wall still remained large copies of Ajanta cave pictures and some faultless Rajput artworks painted by Nandada and framed by teak wood. There also remained a huge iron trunk full of 'the Tagore collection' – Mughal, Rajput and Kangra paintings and other art goods collected with great care by the three Dadamashais. The library room remained alive by its own right in all its brightness.

What a galaxy of learned and talented men, artists, composers, singers, poets, writers, actors, dancers and famous persons frequented the Jorasanko House at that time and were entertained in the library room!

One day we youngsters were sitting on a cot in the northern part of the library room. Sujan was practising a new song of Kattababa and we were listening to it, when one whispered, "Hush! Hush! Somebody is coming."

Sujan's song stopped abruptly. We saw a sahib coming along the wooden staircase and staring here and there. Getting into the library room he asked timidly, "Is this Abanindranath Tagore's house?" As the door was open and there was no one near the door, I gathered courage to come up here."

It is needless to say that the door of the Jorasanko House was always open to all. Formerly there were a few porters at the gate. Later their number came to be so few that it was not always possible to guard the gate.

The sahib seemed puzzled. We were about to inform Dadamashai when the sahib said, "Wait. Let me first be sure where I've arrived." Saying this he came to us and sat on our cot made of cane. He touched his seat and looked around and saw with wonder the picture

on the wall, figures on the table, almirah, chair, everything. Then he remarked, "From outside one cannot guess what is inside. Getting into the house I came across a long staircase which begins in two rows but then joins together and goes up. On top of the staircase there is a beautiful image. And then I come to this room – wonderful. There's no excess anywhere, and I have never seen in my own country or here in yours or in any other country a room so plainly and yet so marvellously decorated."

A thin white tile bordered the top of the doors in the north and the south. On the tiles, with letters made of glass, Dadamashai had written in the style of Urdu script a few maxims from the Upanishad:

TAT ETAT PREYAH PUTRAT,  
PREYO VITTAT, PREA NYASMAT,  
SARVASMAD ANTARATARAM YAD AYAM ATMA

*The 'Atma' is dearer than a son, dearer than riches, dearer than everything else and closer to our heart than all.*

The above maxim was written on the border of a door, and on another was scrawled:

SATYAT NA PRAMADITAVYAM  
DHARMAT NA PRAMADITAVYAM  
KUSHALAT NA PRAMADITAVYAM

*Never deviate from truth, never deviate from Dharma (i.e. from what is good and what is right), and don't neglect taking necessary steps for self-defence.*

The Sahib jumped up as his gaze fell on it. "Do you adorn the borders of your doors like this?" His eyes looked larger in wonder when we had explained it to him. "Abanindranath's handwriting is so beautiful! His writing is as good as his painting."

By then Dadamashai was informed and he took this sahib to the southern veranda. "While painting I will be talking with the Sahib," he said. Later we heard that Dadamashai's Swedish friend Mr. Muller sent the sahib to meet him.

A long time elapsed; dust settled in the library room. The servants did not always sweep it. They shirked their duty; nor were there as many men as before to supervise and look after the room. The library room became old and outmoded in our eyes, but the outsiders still looked at it with wonder. At that time a few Japanese artists came to visit the Dadamashais.

Many famous Japanese artists came to meet them in their youth. With them the Dadamashais were on friendly terms. Surendada introduced Count Okakura to them. After being acquainted with them, Okakura said that on his return to his native land he would send a few Japanese artists to India. Let them come and talk with the Indian artists. Following that connection came Tykkan and Hari – Tykkan is a well-known artist of Japan today. Coming here Tykkan had painted many pictures of *Raslila*<sup>4</sup>. Hari went back to Japan and died quite early in life. Dadamashai used to say, "Had he lived, Hari would have been a great artist like Tykkan." Bardadamashai brought at his own expense another Japanese artist named Kutsuta. At the same time Kattababa brought Sanosan, a wrestler. Sanosan went to Santiniketan to train *jiu-jitsu*<sup>5</sup> to the boys and girls while Kutsuta remained in the Jorasanko House. There he used to paint pictures. His paintings included scenes from The Ramayana, on large pieces of silk. Those pictures remained with Bardadamashai in Jorasanko when Kutsuta went back to Japan. How to preserve them? That was a great problem. Worms of this country were fond of Japanese silk. They completely destroy the pictures by making holes in them. Who could offer the constant care and tireless effort that might save the pictures from destruction? At last, a message came from Japan that they would take the pictures back. There would be no lack of supervision in their museum. For eighteen thousand rupees they bought those pictures and preserved them with care. That, however, would not be for long. All the pictures were burnt off when the city of Tokyo caught fire. From the silk-eating worms to a cauldron of fire.

The Japanese artists of those days saw the affluence and glitter of Jorasanko House and its garden when it was artistically embellished. The masters of the house used to ride a coach drawn by a pair of horses. The house was full of coaches of various names – landau, brougham, phaeton, round coach and palanquin. These had strong and vigorous horses and coachmen worthy of them. Following their trail came the Japanese artists of today. The Dadamashais had grown old; baldness had spread on their heads. Jorasanko House too was like a bald-headed old man with sunken cheeks. Formerly every year colour was put on the house. Now to repair and put colour on every

<sup>4</sup> *Raslila* – the festival of dancing of Radha and Krishna

<sup>5</sup> *jiu-jitsu* – out-of-date form of judo (Japanese marshal art)

part of such a big house was never considered. If the walls, pillars and joists of one part were repaired with lime and sand, the coating of lime and sand of the other part came off exposing its ribs. There only patchwork was done.

The Japanese artists were seated in the library room. They talked a lot. Pictures were shown to them. Now they proposed that they would take photos of the Dadamashais.

Where to take the photo? It was decided that photos would be taken in the garden. It was no longer the much-adorned garden of olden times. Everything in the garden was lying uncared for. Whatever that might be, it was still a garden. The Dadamashais therefore went down to the garden.

The Japanese said, "Your photos will be taken along with that of your house. The house will be the background." Dadamashai said, "Well, Sahib, if you like the house so much, do as you like!"

The Japanese began to seek a suitable corner and eventually they got it. In front of the swing garden there was a hydrant. Water gushing out in torrents from the Ganga was flowing along a drain round the garden and went towards the office room. The pillars and wall near that hydrant were in a wretched state. Because of dampness the layer of sand fell off here and there. Besides, the sparrows pecking on them made them thinner and more slender. The bricks came off in places and exposed the building. No repair was done for quite a long time. That particular corner was the most worn out and poor among the southwestern walls. The Japanese jumped up in joy. "What a wonderful background," they said. "How nice is the current of water! What play of light and shade on the wall. And that green plant inside the creek – it's wonderful. Do please stand on that corner." Camera in hand, the Japanese were overwhelmed with joy.

Dadamashai looked with wonder for some time, and then said, "The fellows have the eye to see. They have sought out a really unique spot. Being Buddhists they have come to a banyan plant?"

Later we had seen the photos of Dadamashai standing there. The photos sent by the Japanese artists were wonderful indeed. From then on we were never sorry, however much the Jorasanko House was crumbling down. Besides, we never thought of rooting out the banyan plant so much praised by the Japanese artists.

## Chapter 20

We had two almirahs full of books on arts and two more on science. Besides, we had books on prose and poetic literature, history, philosophy and collections of essays. We had never attempted to count how many almirahs were there in those rows. Dadamashais, all three of them, were in the habit of buying books. As books were stacked in the library, they did gather an immense amount of dust. We had the duty of dusting the books. The arrangement was the Dadamashais'. They conferred this duty on the mathematics tutor and asked him to make his pupils perform it.

Our studies for the school used to end a few days before the puja vacation. A few dusters were sent from the office. Each of us, a duster in hand, came to be engaged in our work under the guidance of our tutor. Books were brought down and placed on the floor in rows in order to air them. Under our tutor's direction each book was brushed clean and again placed on the shelf of the almirah. The students, boys and girls, big and small, all undertook the task. So pleasing was the task before the vacation. Sitting before us on a low stool, Dadamashai asked for this book and that and encouraged us to read certain books. This was how we had learned to handle books from our very childhood. Dadamashai would sometimes take a book and say, "I'll read this book to you in the evening."

The most suitable books to be read to us were the books on science. Delightful and pleasant were the books on natural science. Dadamashai read to us many a book written by Faber, the French natural scientist and also Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee* and another book on the life of the glow-worms. Romantic descriptions of living things under the sea from which were created the strange characters of *Bhut-potrir Desh* such as Deaf-Blind-Heedless, Basin-Sifted, Hollow-Barrel, Sinister-Deity, Blood-Drinker Umbrella-Covered, Snout-Dangler, Scared-Wit, stories of the surface of the earth and scientific discoveries.

One day he told us the early history of the discovery of aeroplane, a tale of those times when the scientists were trying to fly in the air like the birds. A great many attempts were made, but all failed. A

sahib even broke his limbs in a desperate attempt when he jumped off from a hill by tying two wings on his back. The aeroplane was created only when such attempts to fly like birds ended.

Shutting the book Dadamashai said, "From the point of view of discoveries, that of the aeroplane is nothing. How many people require its use? So far as flying in the air is concerned, scientists have as yet done almost nothing. If you speak of moving on land, the greatest discovery of this age is the bicycle."

Greatly astonished we asked, "How so? Trains, motor cars – these are nothing?"

"All those are like the aeroplane. None is simple or easily available. However, you will find a bicycle in every house. See, that man appears to be almost walking, setting his steps on the ground like most other animals; yet, he is moving so fast. Not with oil, nor with coal, only with his legs he is pushing the machine. Such a simple, light and cheap machine – how admirably it rolls on!"

All of us accepted Dadamashai's argument. Then he said, "We shall be inventing a similar device which everyone may use. Who can say, we can even be millionaires?"

We asked, "What machine?" He rejoined, "The device of crimping the loin cloth."

Flabbergasted, we asked, "Of crimping the loin cloth?"

"It will save much time and trouble and will be useful to everybody. Is it easy to crimp your *dhoti* with your hand? If you can do it with a machine, the job is done. Bring a few broomsticks and we shall make a model."

In those days it was the custom to be present at all social occasions and invitations, clad in a beautifully crimped shawl and *dhoti*. During the pujas and festive days servants used to crimp a couple of *dhotis* and shawls, placing them under their heels on a mat. This required a lot of time, and we were scolded if we tried to attend festivities without a crimped shawl around our neck or wearing the *dhoti* in a commonplace fashion as if we had acted in a very unmannerly and sinful manner. Therefore, a crimped *dhoti* was a must for everyone – be they children or older people.

We were about to run to bring broomsticks when he said, "Wait, do one thing. There is a Japanese hand-fan on top of the almirah in your grandmother's chamber. Bring that here."

When we produced the worn-out hand-fan, Dadamashai tore off whatever Japanese paper was still on it. All the twelve spikes came into view. Now he put a piece of cloth over the top of one spike and under the bottom of another and went on like this for all the spikes. Then, when he folded the fan, the piece of cloth was crimped.

"This is how it is done," Dadamashai said. "Do you understand the design? With the idea of a hand-fan we have to create a machine. If we put *dhoti* and shawl in one end of the machine and roll it, these will come out as crimped from the other."

The machine was clearly visible in our mind's eye. What remained was the making of it. Sticks of a broom and an iron wire in hand, we all set out to work, keeping in mind the model of the Japanese fan.

On that day when Abinashbabu came, Dadamashai informed him about our invention and asked, "Hey Abinash, will the machine for crimping *dhoti* sell in Baranagar?"

In *Pathe Bipathe* we come to know of this Abinash Chakraborti, Dadamashai's friend. There was a time when Dadamashai regularly boarded a steamer with his friend Abinash at Babughat and wandered in the cool air of the Ganga up to Shibtala in Enrenda. Many a time we accompanied Dadamashai in this steamer journey. With betel leaf and dried tobacco leaf, Abinashbabu would come to the steamer. Lighting a thick Burma cheroot, Dadamashai used to sit in the front of the steamer. A group of elderly people would bring to life that part of the steamer by their conversation, gossip and gaiety. Many stories of *Pathe Bipathe* are about this steamer journey. The youngsters of our house had much intimacy with Abinashbabu. He used to make us gifts of embroidered handkerchiefs and paint coloured pictures for us. He had often in his hand a couple of leather-bound exercise books. In these he used to paint pictures with a pointed pen or coloured crayon. At the bottom of these pictures would be inscribed quotations drawn from various sources. Excerpts were collected from Sanskrit literature, *Upanishad*, *Mahabharat*, Shakespeare, Goethe, Kant, Hindi 'Doha'<sup>1</sup> or from his own mind. Those writings were exceedingly interesting, and he gave them to Dadamashai to peruse. Dadamashai would write his comments at the end of every page. On the bottom of a page with the picture of a yellow-breasted, red-winged bird with lifted beak, perched on a blackish branch, Abinashbabu would write:

<sup>1</sup> Doha – Hindi rhymed couplet

*Sir John Forbes, M.D., F.R.S., physician to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, says – Some patients get well with the aid of medicine, more without it, and still more in spite of it.*

For a deep blue bird pressing a yellow seed with its beak, he would write: *Continuous murmuring of the name of Hari will be of no use. Your mind is dirty; only your mouth is full of adulation.* Such remarks filled the pages.

Abinashbabu said, "I alone will sell a hundred crimping machines at Baranagar. People will receive it eagerly."

Hearing this, we were all elated and we felt encouraged. What still remained was to develop the machine. But when we came to do it, the whole thing appeared quite tough. Broomsticks were handled with no progress at all. Nothing like a machine could be created out of these. The sticks remained as before; neither Dadamashai nor we could make anything out of them.

When our enthusiasm almost dwindled, it was heard that a great engineer named Radharaman Roy came to live in the house in front of ours. He was also a great inventor. He had discovered a kind of stool-purifier which did not emit a foul smell, it would never go out of order, its pipe was never blocked, and it did not require much water. It was very cheap and could be easily made. This stool-purifier was installed in almost every house at Santiniketan. At this news we jumped up in joy and passed the message onto Dadamashai. He went to Radharaman Roy along with us. Roy heard attentively about the machine that we had been trying hard for so long to make, and then said, "Why can't I do it? I will surely make a machine for crimping *dhotis*."

We felt assured and thought that since such a big engineer took charge a happy solution was sure to be. However, we were luckless. It was heard that Mr. Roy was trying hard and had also made some progress but no complete solution could be found. After a long wait came the news of Roy Sahib's death. All our hopes thus came to an end.

There were many readers in our library. Not only did the inmates of the house read the books, but many of our friends asked for books from the library. Not all the borrowed books were always returned. They were often lost, and many people forgot to return them. It may be that some of them kept the books wilfully. The key was kept with

our tutor who could often remember the name of the person who had borrowed a particular book. That was, however, not possible in every instance. It was also hard to remember when many people borrowed books at once. He forgot about the books if the gap between the borrowing and returning of the books was quite long. In spite of all this, our library never suffered much loss. For such a big library, loss of one or two books now and then did not matter much. But once the whole set of Carlyle on the French Revolution vanished from the history almirah.

It was a very valuable set, a number of books altogether and very dear to the Dadamashais. These books could not be procured easily. Everyone was quite perturbed. The history almirah remained open for quite a long time as its key was damaged. It was rarely used. Only Dadamashai himself read *Ain-i-Akbari* sometimes. Readers never asked for the history books and that was why the key was not repaired. Our tutor made a new key from a keymaker. But Dadamashai said, "Give me the key. Let the shelf be open. Books will be back in the same way as they went out."

Books are not stolen by the servants. It is done by the gentle folk. We were suspicious of a gentleman who often came to Jorasanko at that time. He also frequented the almirahs in the library. Dadamashai said, "Tell me when he comes."

In a couple of days the gentleman appeared. He took his seat in the ground floor when Dadamashai entered. By then we also assembled there – quite a big gathering. Sitting on a chair with a thud, Dadamashai said, "The same thing again. '—' Thakur's<sup>2</sup> portrait on the wall has stirred. This happened the year after the solar eclipse. Once again it has occurred. When the portrait moved, I knew that something must have happened. Then I heard from Samarda that Carlyle has been stolen."

We looked at Dadamashai's face in surprise.

Lighting a cheroot he asked, "Don't you know that the set of Carlyle has been stolen?"

"That we know. But you say that the portrait has stirred. What's that?"

"Go and see. '—' Thakur's huge oil painting on the wall tilted to

<sup>2</sup> *Thakur* – the name implied was, perhaps, that of Prince Dwarakanath Thakur. The story was fabricated partly jokingly and partly mischievously.

one side by two inches. You will understand if you watch the mark on the wall. That year also Carlyle was the root of trouble. It was not stolen on that occasion. Harish took it for reading. He kept it in his room for three or four days. He did not know when the portrait moved, but he had a nightmare in his sleep and was almost suffocated to death. As a result he rushed to return the whole set of books. That set was bought by '—' Thakur. He used to read these books throughout the night. While performing such reading, he fell ill and then he died. He could not read all the books; and therefore, Babamashai had hung his portrait in front of the almirah of history books. I told Samarda that the old man has been guarding the books so long and he will not brook this. He will surely manage to recover his books. Mastermashai was going to lock the almirah; I told him to keep it open."

We ran upstairs to see how exactly '—' Thakur's portrait moved. We saw that the portrait really moved as the black part of the wall covered by soot and dirt was exposed. The story was also heard by that gentleman who was present. Was it a story after all? This could not be called a story as there was enough proof of the portrait's movement. This story of Thakur was not known to many. Now, after the stirring of the portrait, this anecdote passed from mouth to mouth. We had only suspected the visitor, but there was no proof that he had stolen the books. Till today we do not know who did it. Whoever be the culprit, only after two days from the time of the displacement of '—' Thakur's portrait, the whole set of Carlyle's history of the French Revolution reappeared on the same shelf from where it had disappeared — exactly in front of Thakur's portrait.

Mastermashai came and locked the history almirah. Dadamashai put the pipe of the hookah in his mouth with a mischievous smile and asked that the portrait be pushed a little and set just as it was before.

## Chapter 21

The opera of *Espar-ospur* was over but its mark remained all over the Jorasanko House. Beginning from the masters and mistresses of the house down to the servants and maids, everyone saw that opera. They had enjoyed it to their heart's content. This opera was very different from all the dramatic performances that took place in Jorasanko House. It did not follow the common rules and practices of dramatic art, yet all the viewers and actors wondered how it could overwhelm all of us.

Dadamashai said, "We have discovered the essence of dramatic acting. We are not going to give it up. Let us see if we can discover something more by following the same line of action." Saying this he began to compose dramatic operas. He gave up painting pictures completely. During this period he did not paint for eight to ten years. Nor did he touch paper and brush.

Benthal Sahib was an old friend of Dadamashai and a boss of the Art Society. He had bought many pictures of Dadamashai's and his students from the art exhibition. After retirement, in his old age, he went to England. At that time his son came to India. He had heard much about the Tagore House from his father and had seen and appreciated pictures in his father's collection. Therefore, coming to Calcutta he came running to Dadamashai. He had imagined that he would see an old artist in the midst of his world of brush and colour, absorbed in the art of painting. Coming there he was surprised to see that there was nothing like that – no trace of colour and brush. The person concerned was engaged in writing something; with very small letters in a fat exercise book bound in coarse cloth dyed red, he wrote page after page.

Wanting to know, Sahib said "Doesn't Mr. Tagore paint pictures now?"

Dadamashai replied briefly, "No."

Sahib went on telling many anecdotes – stories about art, the pictures he had seen and the places where he had seen them. Dadamashai would also tell him many tales, and they would have between them badinage, banter and fun. Then Sahib would say

abruptly, "Mr. Tagore, your mind is fresh and green like a young man. You haven't grown old at all. Why have you given up painting then? Can such a great genius like you ...?"

Cutting him short Dadamashai said, "I'm not old yet, but I've grown in age and experience. I've realised that painting is nothing. It's mere childishness. I've been in search of a deeper charm. I am playing with words and watching what pictures blossom in my mind. Sahib, if you knew Bengali, I would have read out to you one of my operas."

Sahib said, "Please send word to me when you will enact an opera. I shall come to hear it. I may not understand the words, but I will appreciate its sound, music and acting."

When the Sahib departed, Dadamashai summoned us all and said, "Benthal Sahib's son wants to hear your opera. Get ready for it. See, I've already a song for the band."

He then read out to us –

*“Drum daddar dhrum dhaddhar  
Kippolo Kippolo  
Thus fire cannon shots  
Of Death’s anniversary;  
Death’s scepter breaks,  
The baton of ruin is in tatters,  
Phallalo  
Drum daddar dhrum dhaddhar  
Kippolo Kippolo.”*

In this way went on the writing of the opera and various experiments with its song. Dadamashai said, "Successful opera may be written on books like *Kathamala*, *Panchatantra*, *Hitopodesh* and Aesop's stories. Let me transform these stories into opera."

At once he wrote the role of the proprietor of the opera.

*“An ancient opera in swan fountain  
Brahma’s swan scrawled in millions of slokas.  
Vishalakhyā the ox with a hump on his neck  
Writes with a horn-pen and gives it a dramatic form.  
Indra’s long-tusked elephant listens with ears intent  
Measures with a yardstick  
and cuts it to size with much difficulty.  
Abin thakur, king among painters, restores its value.*

And finds its true flavour,  
 searching through a host of copies.  
 Matter though small, compact is its form,  
 Its joints are as strong as ropes of grass."

At first he picked up a story from the *Hitopodesh*, that of the tortoise flying in the sky. Seeing the birds, its friends fly in the sky, the tortoise is inspired by the same desire. It gets furious when it is suggested that it has no wings to fly. Addressing its two bird-friends named Sankat and Bikat, the tortoise says, "I float in water – can't I fly in air? I shall grip the middle of a stick with my teeth, and you will float me in the sky holding the two ends of the stick. Once up in the sky you will see me loosen my bite and swim in the air." Everyone knows what happened to the flying tortoise in the end. Dadamashai went on writing the opera and named it *Uranchandi's<sup>1</sup> Opera*.

Then he wrote the song of the tortoise:

"Had I wings I could fly like birds  
 I could reach straight to the moon to dig holes  
 With no feet nor wings, the sky remains far off  
 When I seek to fly, I fidget and fall flat on the earth."

The frog says in reply:

"A bunch of hemp leaves added to hemp  
 Some pills of opium and inhale hard  
 And let out a smoke.  
 Once done fly straight  
 Playfully creating with much fanfare the wings of fancy  
 And go to the land of Siva or that of Brahma –  
 Wherever you please."

In the end the tortoise is practising to fly in the sky.

"To do or to die,  
 To drop down and lay low  
 Or just the reverse.  
 A great fall and destruction  
 Or moving slantingly to fly upwards.  
 High jump, low jump and war-drum,  
 Then to fly slowly upward  
 And to turn turtle in the end."

<sup>1</sup> *Uranchandi* – the figurative meaning is spendthrift while the literal meaning is one who enjoys flying

We had decided to perform this opera. Songs were set to music and the rehearsal began. Then suddenly there came the news of an epidemic that created quite a sensation and put an end to the preparations of the opera. Many of us were laid up with fever, and the enthusiastic group came to be split. From then on, no opera was performed in Jorasanko because of one obstacle or another. Kattababa often enquired about it. The son of Mr. Benthal returned to his own country without getting any invitation for the opera. But Dadamashai went on writing operas in the southern veranda and often read them out to us.

Parashuram's stories were just being released. How could such humorous and witty stories be ignored? Therefore, he wrote an opera based on the story '*Lambakarna*' under the same name and composed the song of Natobar:

“Banshibadan Adhikari of Beliaghata Opera House  
 Bandmaster Landi Latabar  
 Liugi bugle flute and chag-lag larahari”

The song contained an acknowledgement of Parashuram's book *Gaddalika* at the end of it.

“Opera performed by Sadarala  
 Registered without permission  
 With compliments to Gaddalika Printer”

He then construed the story of Jabala in the form of an opera and called it '*Hrisi-yatra*'. The song of *Turi and Juri*<sup>2</sup> was composed.

“An excellent place is Dandaka forest,  
 The abode of Surpanakha, the demon.  
 Take care if you go there  
 Where no one responds to your call.  
 A huge demon of an enormous shape  
 Catches men to devour their raw flesh.  
 On a reed-hedge awaits old Sharabhang  
 Jatayu the bird on the tree *jatamansi*.  
 Illowl and Batapi, terrible and mischievous,  
 Maul-and kill in disguise.  
 Marich the sorcerer roams  
 And refutes the commands of King Ravana  
 Pleased to drink clotted blood of a hermit.

<sup>2</sup> *Turi and Juri* – a pair of singers in an opera

Take care, oh my son, take care."

Even *The Ramayana* was not excepted. Dadamashai had an old *Ramayana* by Krittibus. Its cover was torn. Dadamashai brought it out, dusted it and ordered Radhu to bind it anew. Then the stories from *The Ramayana* were written one after another in the form of operas. He would write, tear them up, write again and read them out to us. They seemed quite nice to us. But Dadamashai did not like these operas based on the *The Ramayana*. At last one day he said, "Now I know wherein lies the fault. *The Ramayana* which is composed in 'payar'<sup>3</sup> cannot be directly transformed into an opera." Therefore, he began to write *The Ramayana* in prose in the form of a manuscript and this continued for a long time.

These included the book of Chainburo, those of burnt Lanka, Hanuman, Maruti, Joyram and Khuddur *Ramayana*. He then began to write the operas of *The Ramayana*, keeping these books in his mind.

He was then so engrossed in these compositions that he felt annoyed if anyone mentioned his painting. This went on for years together. One day he was writing non-stop from the morning. It was quite late in the day. Radhu came once to remind him that it was time to take a bath. Still he did not stop. Just then a young man came straight to the first-floor veranda and touched his feet in obeisance. After offering due respect to Dadamashai, the young man drew a chair and sat on it. Dadamashai recognised him. He was the student of one of his students.

Pausing his pen, Dadamashai looked at the man's face and asked, "What makes you come here?"

The young artist replied, "Sir, I've come to see your painting. I didn't want to disturb you. I supposed I'd see you painting pictures. But you have been writing."

"Yes," he said. "I've been writing these days, writing operas."

"Then I'll come to see your pictures some other time. It's been a long time that I've not seen your pictures."

"I am not painting now. In fact, no picture has been done."

He then expressed the real reason of his coming. "Sir, I came to you ..."

"That I can see."

<sup>3</sup> *payar* – a metrical system of Bengali poetry in which each line consists of 14 letters or syllables

"I want to go to Europe to learn painting. I have been trying to get a scholarship."

Knowing his real purpose, Dadamashai said, "That's good enough – go there. Why come to me?"

The young man answered, "I require a certificate from you."

Dadamashai retorted, "No, no, that you won't get."

Taken aback the young man said, "I've brought a picture. Please see it and then decide if you can give me a certificate. I don't want it gratis."

Saying this, he was about to unfold the packet containing the picture.

Dadamashai said, "You need not show me your painting. Take it back and don't irritate me."

The young artist became angry and said, "I'm a favourite student of your own student. Won't you help me?"

"Don't mention my favourite student! Don't disturb me while I'm writing the opera. Radhu has already urged me to take a bath."

Flabbergasted the youth said, "Then don't you wish our young people to go to Europe and prosper?"

Dadamashai retorted angrily, "Bosh your England and Europe! Say that you want to go there to enjoy yourself and to squander money. Why do you say that you are going to learn art? If you really want to learn art, stay here."

Extremely enraged the youth said, "Then I understand that you are not going to help men like me who have been struggling to learn art."

"You seem to be very impudent and utterly lacking in courtesy. You are disturbing an old man in his work. You have dragged the chair and sat on it without my permission. Go away and don't enrage me any more."

The young man jumped out of the chair and went off like a shot from our southern veranda, muttering some word angrily.

Calling us aloud Dadamashai said, "See where he has gone. Has he gone to summon people to beat me?"

Peeping and prying here and there, we could not see him. From then onwards he did not come to Jorasanko House for a long time.

At that time Dadamashai's friends, students and many others often asked him to paint pictures. But he did not even raise his face from

the opera book. He felt annoyed if anyone insisted. He had given up sitting on the broad wooden chair close to his desk that contained his colour and brush. The round basin that used to be filled with water for his painting remained dry. At last one day Radhu turned it upside down. Thus passed nearly eight years.

At last one morning when Dadamashai was writing an opera and leaning on his designed chair of Burma wood, Mukulbabu arrived in the veranda of Jorasanko House.

He was then the Principal of the Government Art School in Calcutta. At once he spread a large half-finished picture on the red floor of our veranda.

Looking down his spectacles at him, Dadamashai asked, "What is your intention, Mukul?"

Mukulbabu said, "You go on writing your opera while I shall be sitting here and painting my picture." Then he sat with a thud.

Dadamashai knew Mukulbabu from his childhood. He was ever obstinate. If he insisted on anything, he would not let it go. No one could change his ways even by scolding him. Therefore, instead of disturbing him, Dadamashai paid attention to his opera. Only seeing the huge arrangement of colour, brush and paper, he asked, "Mukul, will you have your lunch here?"

Mukulbabu replied, "Only a bit of fish curry and rice, nothing more."

Calling Radhu, Dadamashai ordered, "Go and inform that Mukul will have his lunch here." Radhu knew that Mukulbabu was a voracious eater. He went to arrange a sumptuous dish.

From then on Mukulbabu often came to our house. All morning he would sit at the feet of Dadamashai and paint, spreading a large picture on the floor. One of his pictures depicted an old huge temple with a bell hanging from it. A girl who came to attend the worship was standing in front of the temple. While writing his opera, Dadamashai's eyes fell on the picture. It was such a large picture that it could hardly escape one's notice. Mukulbabu's pictures were always like that — very large. The girl standing in front of the temple wore a very costly and glistening cloth. Dadamashai asked Mukulbabu to blend colour with water and to give him water and a flat brush. He rose from his writing desk and then splashing colour and water, turned the expensive cloth into one very old and worn

out. "It won't do if it looks like one just bought from a shop. It must be costly, yet old. Practise for some time how to wash your painting with water and a flat brush."

This was how Mukulbabu's picture '*Mahakaler Mandire*' (At the Temple of *Mahakal*<sup>4</sup>) was painted.

Thus Mukulbabu began to bring large pictures to our veranda and lay them there. One was the picture of *Ganesha*<sup>5</sup>. Another of Srikrishna on the lap of *Basudeva*<sup>6</sup> sitting on blue Yamuna. Mukulbabu could not express the colour of Yamuna. Plucking the brush from his hand, Dadamashai mixed tea-water and aluminum powder with blue and painted the water of Yamuna with a few touches. Those who see that picture even today are struck with wonder to see the beautiful waves of Yamuna.

Days passed in this way. A marvellous thing happened one day. Mukulbabu used to leave his paper, colour and brush in the Jorasanko House. One day he came to paint quite early in the morning. He saw that Dadamashai held on his lap paper, colour and brush instead of the fat exercise book for writing opera. The paper he held was also Mukulbabu's, those portions that Mukulbabu used to cut from the sides of a large paper. Brush and colour also belonged to him. Dadamashai had been drawing from the morning and his picture was almost done. This was the first picture of the '*Kabi Kankan*' series.

That was the beginning. The credit of bringing the habit of painting back was Mukulbabu's. It was he who again brought back Dadamashai, from Kathamala's Country of Hattamala, to the domain of painting. From then on Dadamashai began to complete a picture every day. He finished it in the morning, and people came to see it in the afternoon – every day he painted a new picture. Mukulbabu came to practise painting silently, at the feet of his master, hidden from people's view. We do not know how far he had advanced in his own painting, but he had helped to revive the flow of Dadamashai's art of painting after nearly ten years. After this about a hundred pictures like '*Kabi Kankan Chandi*', '*Krishnamangal*', '*Parabat*' etc. rushed out of his hand.

<sup>4</sup> *Mahakal* – mythological idea of a terribly destructive manifestation of Lord Shiva

<sup>5</sup> *Ganesha* – the eldest son of Shiva and Durga, the presiding deity of success

<sup>6</sup> *Basudeva* – the father of Lord Krishna

## *Chapter 22*

There were two office rooms in Jorasanko House – the records room and the cutchery. On the carpeted bedstead of the records room, folding his legs, sat Phanibabu with his fat accounts books. He was the chief among the employees. He used to fold four times and longitudinally the white pages of his accounts book and wrote the daily expenditure along a fold in the native tradition. There were two other office bearers – Harinathbabu and Gupibabu. The main business of Harinathbabu was what in English is called repair and maintenance. He used to be engaged in repairing, whitewashing, colouring and even polishing everything in the house beginning with the walls, roof, windows, doors and bars down to tables, chairs, boxes, trunks and even toy cars and horses. Gupibabu was the marketing manager. Another person in the office was Pachababu. Although he belonged to that group, he never did any regular office work. He was, however, a source of amusement to all. He hailed from Jessore and was perhaps a distant relation of Dadamashai. Therefore, no one refrained from making him a butt of ridicule. He was outwitted in many ways by making him eat earthen fruits, leafy sweetmeats or real sweets with slime put into them. He would be threatened abruptly by a rubber-made snake having been thrown on the floor. He was quite old, but he was not married yet. Therefore, young servants, whoever was available, were presented to him dressed as brides. Pachababu liked everyone he saw. Once, shaving his moustache and covering his face with a veil, Kshitish went to Pachababu. In spite of Kshitish being very dark, Pachababu came to like him. He was told that the girl came from Jessore to our house. He was always in search of the girl and asked where she had gone. He looked inquisitively into every nook and corner of the inner parts of the house, but nowhere could she be found. Consequently, he became rather depressed.

The records room was the office of expenses while the cutchery office was concerned with the collection of taxes. Both the offices stood close to the garden, and between these two offices there was a water closet. Almost all through the day water gushed out of the four faucets of the taps, and this water was used for washing and

cleansing utensils and for bathing. These two offices did not feel disturbed even with the loud noise generated by the sound of gushing water, the grating sound of rubbing utensils and the quarrels and shouts of servants and maids. On one side Phanibabu, sitting on the carpet and with bent head, went on taking down expenditures; on the other, Kishoribabu, drawing the chair close to his table, did his work with intent attention. Kishoribabu was the chief officer in the cutchery.

His assistants were Manoranjanbabu and a few others. All business associated with the estate – such as collection of taxes, realization of dues, lawsuits, appeals – everything was done from this office.

We used to move about in every nook and niche of these two offices. We did not always venture to get into them, but sometimes, failing to resist the attraction of those darkened rooms full of papers, we entered abruptly the records room and the cutchery. These two rooms were very different from the other rooms in the house. We were not allowed to stay there for a long time. We might have entered those rooms under some pretext. Perhaps I required a pair of Taltala slippers and went to Gupibabu to provide him with the measurement of my foot, or some paper made in Serampore was required for the binding of an exercise book and that could be supplied by Harinathbabu. But when our business was over, we were not allowed to sit on the carpeted bedstead of clerks and spend some time there. Raising his face from the accounts book if Phanibabu began to look harshly at us through the opening of his spectacles, we at once came out of the records room.

When we had grown a little older and felt bolder to enter the cutchery, one midday we went to the darkest part of the room and discovered a picture hung on the wall. It was a very old picture, forgotten and neglected. Who knows how long it was there, hiding its face in spider webs and soot? In that summer afternoon a streak of light like a thin thread came through a chink in a window and fell on the dark corner partly enlightening the picture. In that light a beautiful picture was exposed before us.

I dragged the picture up. Dusting it all over I found that it was the copy of a European painting bound in glass. Rescuing the picture from that dark cave, I took it to Kishoribabu and said, "See what is in the dust of your cutchery."

Kishoribabu was not at all surprised. He said, "No one goes to that corner, and I do not know what broken pieces lie there."

We said, "We are taking it away."

Documents and records were more valuable to Kishoribabu. The cutchery would not have lost its value to him if some such pictures were lost from it. Besides, he said that he did not know about the existence of such a picture. Therefore, he nodded in assent to our proposal. We rubbed and washed the picture and hung it on a wall on the ground floor. Much of the wall with its cracked plaster was covered by the picture. In place of the wall with cracks and chinks, now there stood a lake. A row of stone steps went down to the lake. Water was deep down in the lake. A few girls, seeking to bathe in it, were stepping down on them. Their appearance suggested that they were from Iran, Turkey or some other lands.

After hanging the picture on the wall, we had little interest in it. We had almost forgotten about it when one day Dadamashai's eyes fell on it.

"Wherfrom did you get it? Where was it? I had searched for it some time ago. They told me that all the pictures had been sent to Shahzadpur. How could it be found? Do you know what it is? It is a picture of Rabi uncle's 'Hungry Stones'."

We enquired, "How so?"

Dadamashai said, "Yes. This picture used to hang in the library. There were many such pictures from the time of our father. You haven't seen that library. It was decorated in the European style. At that time when Rabi came here, he used to see that picture. Then the *Khamkheyali Sabha*<sup>1</sup> meeting was going on. One day he said, "This picture evokes the idea of a story in my mind. I will write it." Soon afterwards he wrote the story and read it out in the *Khamkheyali Sabha*. That is the story of 'Hungry Stones'. He had seen the stone palace on the bank of the river in Shahibag, when he stayed at Shahibag in Ahmedabad with his second brother. Then he had the habit of looking at this picture here. 'Kshudhita Pashan' (Hungry Stones) was created out of these two images in his mind. At that time, on our hearing that story, our limbs almost froze. "Bring *Galpaguchha*<sup>2</sup> and read out the story."

<sup>1</sup> *Khamkheyali Sabha* – "Meeting of the Whimsicals"

<sup>2</sup> *Galpaguchha* – a collection of stories by Rabindranath Tagore

We opened that page of 'Hungry Stones' where Kattababa writes:

"About two and a half centuries ago, the second Soha Memood built this palace in a solitary place for the enjoyment of earthly pleasures and luxury. From then on rose-scented water flowed into the bathing room, through the spouts of the spring. In that solitary room, cooled by the fine particles of water, young Persian women seated on smooth marble throne, their soft naked legs spread in the transparent water, hair loosened, a sitar on their lap, used to sing the *gazals* of the vineyard."

Dadamashai said, "See how they have painted the marble throne. How they are coming down to the water with naked legs and a harp in hand. The picture was good indeed! At one time we had been discarding everything European and thus the pictures were lost."

About the year 1895 '*Hungry Stones*' was read out at the *Khamkheyali Sabha*. Sitting in an armchair in the billiard room of the Jorasanko House on the ground floor, Kattababa was writing '*Hungry Stones*' – such a picture was painted by Dadamashai in black ink and a pointed pen. Immediately after that came the waves of national sentiment. When they touched the Jorasanko House, the Dadamashais first went into the library room and removed the heavily fringed curtains, foreign pictures hanging on the walls and the furniture made in foreign style. They had thrown away everything that seemed alien. Emptying the room they had decorated it according to their own choice. In fact, at that time there existed nothing that might be called 'native style'. Therefore, the Dadamashais devised many designs and different styles of decorating a room. Foreign pictures were pulled down and sent to their estate at Shahzadpur. This was done furtively. While these pictures were being sent to Shahzadpur, a few of them must have been left among the heaps of paper in the office room, in the dark corners of its wall. Thereupon, people forgot about those pictures and for so long they remained hidden under the soot-covered blackish shelves.

Another picture was rescued from the office room. It was an oil painting by Dadamashai – a cockatoo painted at a time when Dadamashai was learning painting in the European style in oil painting on canvas, set on the easel. As beautiful was its form, so was the glamour of its brilliant colours.

We were charmed to see it and remarked, "Did you throw away

such a fine picture?"

Dadamashai replied, "That was the period of the freedom movement. We began to paint in a completely new style of our own. Therefore, even the works done under the training of the Italian masters were removed from our sight. However, now I see that those pictures were not bad."

At that time Dadamashai had piled up all his oil paintings and sold them off to the shopkeepers of old articles at Bowbazar. He did not sell only a picture of Dwarakanath in sitting posture, but this picture of the cockatoo somehow endured, hidden and unknown to anyone.

This picture was set near the main gate close to the big clock, and it remained there for quite a long time. Then no one knew where it went. During the marriages things had to be shifted here and there, and that might have caused the disappearance of the picture – who knows?

We very much liked this picture of the cockatoo painted by Dadamashai. In fact, this colourful cockatoo seemed to us much better than Dadamashai's watercolour paintings. It may be because of the discovery of this picture or for some unknown reason that many of us began to paint. We had neither brush nor colour. But that problem was easily solved when we went to the estate office and asked for Gupibabu's help. We used to paint according to our own will and never went to Bardadamashai or Dadamashai to learn the art of painting. That was not the practice of Jorasanko House. Nor did we ever bother about a picture being good or bad. Our pictures were all bogus; still we used to paint for our own delight. Only we thought sometimes that it would have been better had one of the Dadamashais come to see our pictures by chance. However, they never even glanced at them.

But once they did. The picture was painted by Sujan. The incident caused a great stir. Those of us who had been a little older than Sujan could not paint a cockatoo like Dadamashai, but at least we painted birds snub-nosed or with nose truncated, a rat with a tail or we could draw a shape of some sort. Poor Sujan could draw nothing. No shape, line or figure could he paint. After a lot of toil Sujan painted a picture, the content of which was the earth and the sky. Half of the bottom of the page showed only a rough, yellowish earth with no sign of green anywhere – just a thin paste of yellow. In the upper

half of the page there was a little bit of light blue representing the sky.

Sujan must have liked the picture very much or why would he enter Kokomama's study secretly and display the picture with great care on an empty shelf on the wall? The shelf and the wall remained vacant for so long. With the display of the picture, there was at least something to draw one's attention. And at least for that Sujan's talent needed to be appreciated. However, it was not to be so. Getting into the room Kokomama flew into a rage as he saw that picture on the shelf. At once he flung the picture brutally out of the room. He did not even try to know whose picture it was and who put it there. It seemed to him a piece of rubbish. When Sujan discovered that his picture was rolling on the ground, he took it up with care, entered Kokomama's room secretly and again put up his painting there.

Somehow Sujan liked that shelf and did not want to put the best specimen of his painting in a much inferior place. What did that matter to Kokomama? Seeing that picture again on the same shelf, he grew furious, crumpled the picture and threw it forcibly on the grassy plot of the garden. After a while Sujan came and, peeping into the room, he saw that the picture was not on the shelf. Looking here and there he saw the crumpled picture on the grass. He picked it up and his eyes welled with tears as he looked at it. The poor fellow held the picture to his breast as if it was a baby. Just then Dadamashai came in.

He said, "What is it that you have picked up? Let me see."

Sujan showed him his beautiful picture and its crushed and rumpled state, and said, "Kokokaka has twisted it and thrown it out."

"Come above with me with your picture." Saying this, Dadamashai went to the southern veranda with Sujan and his picture. There he drenched that piece of paper in water and spread it on a board.

"See, all the marks of its being twisted have been cleaned off. Only a bit of this portion has been torn and, therefore, the marks will not be wiped out. That's better, though." He then drew one or two thin lines of dark brown and green on that torn and crumpled portion. Moreover, he put a green tint on it. Nothing more had to be done. The crumpled marks were concealed and the picture was complete – a fine picture! A long stretch of a sunburnt rough meadow, at one corner of which there was a soft greenish shadow of green trees.

"Ask Mohanlal to mount it on a cardboard."

I pasted Sujan's picture on a piece of white cardboard with gum.

Being puffed up, Sujan with his picture now entered Kokomama's room. Kokomama was stunned!

From that day we had always seen that picture in Kokomama's study – that trifling picture came to life with just a touch of Dadamashai's brush. That picture was never taken off from the shelf, from where it used to adorn the room.

## Chapter 23

When Kattababa was about sixty-five, he was weighed against books on the occasion of his birthday. In the evening as Bichitra Hall was lit up, Kattababa entered. He wore a new plaited *dhoti* and had a fine white shawl on his shoulder. A huge weighing scale with iron chains was hung in Bichitra hall. Kattababa sat on a square wooden platform on one side of the scale; on the other was piled up volumes of books printed by Viswa Bharati. However, the scale would not lean so easily. We were amazed to see the number of books amassed. In those days great princely persons used to be weighed against gold or silver, and these precious metals were distributed among the poor. Kattababa was only a poet, not a princely person; and, therefore, he was weighed against books and those books were distributed in many places. Instead of Lakshmi's favour, people had Saraswati's grace.

Then happened Kattababa's *Jayanti* (anniversary) on his seventieth birthday. That was when the word 'Jayanti' was introduced all over the country for the first time and it was a nationwide festival. Formerly, Jayanti was celebrated as a homely event in the Bichitra Hall among his own people and close friends. But there was nothing of that sort in the Jayanti festival celebrated. It meant a pompous ceremony consisting of external celebrations such as meetings, associations, addresses and replies, addresses of honour, garlanding, adopting resolutions etc. The whole country became excited about the Rabindra Jayanti, and from then on the festival spread all over the country. At that time a proposal was raised to celebrate Dadamashai's Jayanti. Dadamashai, however, paid no heed to it.

"Rabika deserves to receive such honour. He had visited many countries and took part in great affairs. Do all these suit me?"

Those who came to him with the same request had to go back with a rebuff. "Go away and don't irritate me. I'm the last person to do all that."

Nobody dared approach him any further. The proposal was forgotten. Dadamashai crossed sixty and attained sixty-five years.

Then he gradually approached seventy. By then the proposal reached Kattababa's ear. He heard that it was Dadamashai himself who had stopped the proposal of Jayanti festival. Then Kattababa himself snubbed him one day.

"Hey Aban, if your people want to celebrate your Jayanti and offer you an address of honour, what have you to say to that? Go – get ready to accept the honour."

That was Rabika's order. He said this in the name of his countrymen, and after this nothing more could be said. Now Dadamashai felt that he would have to surrender to the celebration of Jayanti like a good soul.

One day he said, "People now talk about Jayanti, but do you know we had celebrated the first Jayanti of Rabika here in this southern veranda? That was in the time long past. There were no lectures. Dada had decorated lotus buds in empty bottles which had been carried by you. Don't you remember?"

Suddenly the incident flashed in my mind and I said, "Yes, I do remember. It had happened long ago, but I recollect it well enough. That was the only event of those times that I remembered."

We were then quite small. One day going to the southern veranda in the morning we saw that there was a display on the marble table. In a few round opaque glass bottles lotus buds were placed. It was perhaps the end of the rainy season. The lotus buds kept in rows in a corner of the veranda were sparkling in the soothing morning light of dawn after a torrential rain. The Dadamashais were sitting in the front. We heard that all the children were summoned. Even the cousins dwelling in the houses on a road behind ours were coming. As many children were required as there were glass bottles. There was no dearth of children in the Tagore family of Jorasanko, at least at the time when we were young. Very soon a part of the veranda was filled by a crowd of children.

They came washed clean and wearing clean clothes, for they had to walk in rows and carry the bottles filled with flowers to Kattababa on the second floor of the other house. Kattababa had then just reached Jorasanko after travelling in foreign countries. All this arrangement in the morning was for his felicitation and it was specially given by the Dadamashais. It was their own affair, and so its arrangement was also original. I do not remember exactly if it was

after the receipt of the Nobel Prize or after his return from Japan. Whatever it might be, Kattababa was not in a good mood. The gaudy colour and artificiality of the sort of felicitation that his countrymen offered only enraged him. The great men in those days were honoured and felicitated with a wreath of marigold, a bouquet of roses, a song of welcome and solemn addresses full of erudition. All these naturally annoyed and irritated a man like Kattababa.

What the Dadamashais did was something novel. The shopkeepers in Burabazar glass shops used to make round hollow bottles by pouring melting glass into iron pipes and blowing into them. They bought those bottles for one paisa each. A lotus bud was put in each of these bottles. It suited so well with the shape and colour of these hollow bottles that it seemed even bottles made of crystal would not look so beautiful. A group of boys and girls, each with a bottle in hand, came out into the morning glow of the sun from House No. 5 to go to House No. 6. Those who sent these offerings remained in the background. The angelic procession went forward. Moving round the spiral staircase they went up to the second floor. The angels put down the offerings in the western room where the poet was sitting with his writings in his lap, bowed to him and went away silently. There was no inaugural song, nor any address to speak. It was said that this was very much to Kattababa's liking.

When their Rabika came back home after gathering great honour and a world-famous name, his nephews rendered him their obeisance only that once in their own pleasant way. This, however, is not recorded in any printed laudatory address.

This was the Jayanti performed by the Dadamashais. Who is going to celebrate such an anniversary these days? Nowadays no festival can be held without drumbeats and publicity, not to speak of a Jayanti.

Dadamashai had written somewhere: "Things have changed today. A small memorial meeting, one held in the town hall or a party of musicians – all are alike. Little difference is there between a marriage party and a funeral. All these seem so queer to us. Once I told Rabika, 'Do something. This is too much for us to bear. All celebrations have been jumbled up.' He did not respond. He only kept his eyes closed."

So Dadamashai's seventy years' birth anniversary was held according to the prevailing custom.

However, Kattababa could not be a witness to that festival. That

year he had passed away. Even while lying on his sickbed he had instructed the Dadamashais about the celebration of Jayanti festival and wrote an eulogium for him. That was printed as preface to Dadamashai's '*Gharoa*'. The country was overwhelmed with grief at the demise of the Poet, but even he had ordered to celebrate Abanindra's Jayanti. Dadamashai accepted the order tamely. He did not protest against anything — burning of incense, meetings, addresses, garlanding and smearing of sandal paste.

Sometimes Dadamashai had to attend meetings. In spite of his strong dislike of these, he had no way out. The customs of the country were gradually changing. How could he avoid them? He used to say exactly what he had written about these meetings. He used to say, "It's quite good that you have been holding meetings. It's also good that you have learnt something good from the sahibs. But how is it that there will be no difference between a cheerful gathering and a condolence meeting? How I wish that you could realize the difference. Both celebrations require a president, both require tables and chairs. In both appear an assembly of gentle folk and lectures are delivered. Why? Why all this farce?"

Once, the students of a college came to Dadamashai and implored him to preside over their meeting. They were observing the condolence meeting of their principal.

Dadamashai said, "How is it? Didn't you take me to your college last year? I met your principal. He was a nice person. Did he pass away?"

The boys replied, "Yes, Sir. Last year you had presided over our annual function. Our principal used to refer to that occasion with great pride. That is why everybody wants you to preside over his condolence meeting."

"You seem to be quite intelligent! That year you had invited me to see your function, in its stead. I had to deliver a lecture and listen to other people's addresses. This year also you must have arranged ample lectures instead of shedding tears in a condolence meeting."

"Sir, how can we express our grief without a condolence meeting?"

"That's well said. Now go back. On the day of the meeting, come to escort me there."

When the boys left, Dadamashai called Kshitish and asked him to

inform Mishir about the day on which he would go out in the evening. "Bring me a few newspapers of yours."

Scratching his head Kshitish said, "Sir, what would you do with newspapers?"

"Instead of asking questions, bring as many newspapers as you can get. It won't matter much if these are very old."

When Kshitish came in with the newspapers, he said, "Sit down and find out wherever somebody delivered a lecture. Peruse then one upon another."

Bengali dailies often used to quote the sayings of important speakers along with the news. Kshitish read out a few selected speeches. Dadamashai listened to these, while painting a picture and holding the pipe of his hookah in his mouth. Then one day the lunch and mid-day nap being over, he wrote a fine speech — really an excellent one to deliver to the people. A perfect one according to the standards of newspapers and acceptable on any occasion. It included everything, though nothing was stated in particular.

Dadamashai read it to us and said, "Henceforth, whatever be the occasion, this speech will be applicable. No one will be able to catch its secret. Keep it for future use."

I had kept it in store. When the boys came to take him, I handed him the piece of writing. Dadamashai took it, pondered a while, then returned it and said, "Let it remain. Perhaps it is better not to speak it in a condolence meeting."

Saying this, he left for the meeting. On that occasion that speech could not be delivered in the condolence meeting. The assembled gathering listened to what he said extempore.

When Dadamashai came back, we said, "You could as well read it. No one would have taken it for banter."

Dadamashai promptly replied, "No, not in a condolence meeting. I will read it on a festive occasion. Give the speech to me then."

On another occasion I tried to put it in Dadamashai's hand when he was going to attend an inaugural function. He mused for a while and returned it. In fact such a fine speech was never delivered anywhere.

Unfortunately, the piece of composition was lost. Years after when we thought of publishing it and throwing light on its mystery, it could not be found.

## *Chapter 24*

After a long sojourn in a foreign country and completion of my foreign education, I had returned to Jorasanko. Bardadamashai was no more. So was Mejodidima. Mejdadamashai and Dadamashai no longer reposed on the southern veranda. The hubble-bubble vanished. Dadamashai now took nothing else but cheroot. Mejdadamashai smoked a cigarette once in a blue moon. Kshitish died of tetanus from rat-bite. Who knows if it was not one of those big rats that frightened Kshitish in the cash-room by romping noisily. No one cleansed the staircase of the Jorasanko House with a broomstick. Dust gathered in creeks and openings of windows and doors and nooks and corners of big darkened rooms. Walls had not long been whitewashed. The very look of Jorasanko had changed. However, reaching home and alighting from the car, as I went up along the staircase of the main gate, Dadamashai rubbed his two days' unshaved beard on my newly-shaved soft cheeks. I felt that I came back to that old Jorasanko. It had not changed at all. This Jorasanko House began with three Dadamashais and three Didimas. They were not yet grandparents but had just begun to be parents – a family of six with a huge estate and their mother as the head of the family. None of them was fond of luxury, nor was any of the three brothers extravagant. Bardadamashai had only a fancy for buying new toys, while Mejdadamashai used to buy new books. Dadamashai only wandered before the showcases of adorned shops but never bought anything. They were given to charity, and there were many people whom they had supported. They met their educational expenses; and when someone came with a request, they even offered expenses for the treatment of serious ailments. They provided food and shelter to many, and there were instances that they even built houses for others. The expenses of their family and of everything else were borne by the money that flowed like a stream from the fountain of their estate. In the course of time the family grew and the number of members rose up to forty-five. By that time, various taxes were imposed on the income from the estate.

Because of the reduction of income and increase of expenses,

they had often thought of selling the house. This time, when I had returned from the foreign country, I heard of the same discussion. In the past the Dadamashais had been embarrassed many a time because of the unreliability of income from the estate. Therefore, the problem was not new. The house at Puri had already been sold. Whenever there was a dearth of money, it was heard, "Let the house be sold." Perhaps they thought the selling of the house would solve all the problems. When the First World War broke out and the price of land soared, lawyers and brokers were almost sure that they would take this chance to compel its owners to sell the Jorasanko House. The Dadamashais also knew that they had no other way but to rely on the lawyers and brokers. At once Bardadamashai sat with large sheets of paper, compass, pen, ink and a handkerchief to make sketches of three houses for the three brothers. Rumours reached them regarding the price of land. Someone would calculate impromptu the price of Jorasanko House in terms of *lakhs*<sup>1</sup>. Immediately Bardadamashai made three other sketches along with their blueprints. In summer at midday, keeping cool the library room by shutting its doors and windows, we used to see those sketches. We would be informed about everything, about the site of each house, its requirements, which room was to be big and which small. Bardadamashai would listen and then make a new sketch. It is difficult to say how many sketches were made at that time. He used to say, "Once I had displayed that I could design furniture, now I will show you that I can build a house." It was a pleasure to them to think of a new house, its rooms, windows and doors, veranda and yard, lanes and by-lanes – all very much to their liking; and besides, everything was planned by an artist like Bardadamashai. In spite of all this, they pined for the old house. At last, one day Dadamashai gave vent to their feeling.

"Let the new house be built. What harm if we keep the old one too? We may come here occasionally."

Actually this was what everyone wished for.

The house seemed too small to accommodate all. Things could not be arranged properly and that caused great inconvenience. They would have been happy if they had three properly arranged houses. Besides, it could be great indeed if a big profit could be made by

<sup>1</sup> *lakh* – the sum of 100,000 in the Indian numbering system

selling the house. Still, it was not so easy to leave the residence of one's forefathers. Therefore, Jorasanko House could not be sold. Many in the vicinity sold their residence at a great profit. They went somewhere else to settle. But in spite of the disadvantages of such a big joint family, the Dadamashais could not break the bond with the Jorasanko House.

So, this time when the tide of selling the house rose again, we thought it would ebb as before. We used to sit as before on the cane-bound hard cot of the library room and spend time in joking and gossiping. We could not believe that we would ever have to leave this library room. It was about evening one day. Winter was over. A slight, cool southern wind was blowing. The lower end of the pale sky which almost touched the trees of our garden now looked radiant after sunset. Sitting silently in the southern veranda, Dadamashai was looking at that part of the sky. Seeing me pass by, he called and asked me to sit. As I took my seat, he said, "Perhaps the house can no longer be saved."

I knew that at midday came the workers of the estate and cutchery and the lawyers too. I said, "This is the same old story. Your debt is eternal, and I have heard many a time you would have to repay your debt by selling the house. The debt increased and decreased. Let it go on like this. Why should you sell the house for that?"

Dadamashai said, "No, it is not like that. Things have now changed. Nobody likes to live in the old house. Dada passed away and the family tie has become fragile. There is rift in the mind of Jorasanko. Things have been aggravated by the outbreak of war. They say it is now time for selling the house. They cannot wait any longer!"

Dadamashai had caught it right. There was rift in the mind of Jorasanko. He felt that this time the house could not be saved. "Dada is no more. Who will dream of the new house, make new sketches? Who is there to say, 'Let us keep the old house too'."

Dadamashai smiled suddenly and said, "*Kah gata Mathurapuri Jadupateh! Raghupateh kah gatottarakoshala?*"<sup>2</sup>

He uttered these words very lightly under the clear sky of

<sup>2</sup> Sanskrit saying – "Where has now gone the Mathurapuri of Jadupati! Where is it now the Uttarkosala of Raghupati!"

*Falgun*<sup>3</sup>. Those ancient words that are true for all time. Although the words were uttered in a light vein, one felt that under the radiant sky of a deepening evening in Jorasanko a great burden seemed to descend on him.

After this, one year passed off. Jorasanko House became a little more old and worn out. Decaying walls and pillars near the swing garden of which the Japanese artists took snapshots were in the same state of ruin. No one attempted to repair them nor root out the banyan tree that grew in the crevice of the wall. It was only a little bigger and a bit more stout than what the Japanese artists had seen. Who can tell what juice nourished it in the wall? The *dopati*<sup>4</sup> plant in the garden sprouts wherever its seeds drop. The gardener who still works there knows he is the last gardener in Jorasanko. He has little interest in beautifying the garden. He does not come to Mejdadamashai to be advised regarding the garden. Nor does Mejdadamashai summon him, unlike before.

However, lately there was a peculiar change in the rooms of the outhouse and its furniture. For many years the masters were trying to curtail the expenses of the servants working outside the main building. Those servants were always discontented – that was quite natural, because for so long they worked effortlessly and four servants were appointed where only one was enough. Now they did not work as they were dissatisfied. Rooms outside the main building such as the library, the hall and the school were full of dust. The manners of the servants of a big landlord's house were very different from those of a middle-class family. Who would dare ask them to clean with a mop? They were the last persons to pay heed to that. Therefore, we had been long habituated to use dusty chairs and tables. Then a new servant came to work in place of the old one. Perhaps realising the state of the masters, the old one departed. One day Dadamashai said, pointing to a particular direction, "Just see what he has done."

I saw that the new bearer was cleaning the furniture of the library room, rubbing off the dirt in such a way as was not done for a long time. Dadamashai said, "This fellow belongs to these days. He does

<sup>3</sup> *Falgun* – the eleventh month of Bengali calendar (from the middle of February to the middle of March)

<sup>4</sup> *dopati* – a kind of flower

not know daintiness — only knows how to toil hard. Times have changed, my dear. We have become outdated."

He went on, "We had Mahabir. Do you think he was like this fellow? He was only satisfying my fancy. He had no work, but only stood holding the plaited end of my *dhoti* when I wore one."

Once in a while Dadamashai put on a *dhoti* when he had to go out. Although at one time he was mad about the invention of a crimping machine for *dhotis*, we had rarely seen him wear one. From this we could guess how much work Mahabir had to do.

Then he said, "The key of my wardrobe lay with him. He used to go to the theatre wearing my clothes. One day as I was to go out, I asked him to bring a particular dress, but Mahabir went on saying, 'Wear this one please.' I insisted and asked him to bring the other one, but he was quite unwilling. At last he said, 'It is in the box of dirty clothes and is to be sent to the washerman.' 'How is it? I have not worn it. How could it be in the box of dirty clothes?' Still the fellow says, 'Yes, you have worn it. You do not remember such things.' Is it? I say, 'I do not remember whether I wore it or not. I have never worn the garment. Be quick to confess where you went wearing my dress.' Then the truth was out. He wore that outfit and thus embellished, he went to the theatre. What a fancy! I gave the dress to Mahabir saying, 'Go — satisfy your fancy'."

Such was a servant of those days. You were not a man if you have to toil hard, keeping your head down and handling dust and dirt. Mahabir managed to get tips from Dadamashai by devising all sorts of plans. He did some evil willingly to enrage Dadamashai and even yielded to punishment. Afterwards when Dadamashai felt that the poor man was treated wrongly, he gave him money to please him. Once, Dadamashai's tobacco was burnt off while painting, and he asked Mahabir to bring a fresh bowl of tobacco. Hearing this Mahabir hid in his own room. The plan was designed beforehand, and therefore, he did not respond to repeated calls of Dadamashai. The bowl of tobacco now turned into ashes. Then he asked durwan Achilal to bring Mahabir by pulling his ears. When brought before Dadamashai, Mahabir stood in such a way that Dadamashai grew more angry and hit him with the pipe of his hookah. This was what Mahabir was expecting; and so though not much hurt, he began to cry showing as if he had great pain. His cry was stopped only when Dadamashai

gave him two rupees.

In a few days the library room was sparkling under the care of a new servant of the new age. We had never seen it so bright before.

At this time Dadamashai was making *kutum-katam* with broken things. He did not throw away any piece of broken article as he wanted to do something with every piece. He also liked to tell stories of olden times. Hearing them from Dadamashai's mouth, Ranidi used to take down those stories.

One day Dadamashai said, "Rani has come at the right time. At one time I told many old stories to you and Jasimuddin but you did not take them down. Rani will be able to do it. But I told you just a few. Now, however, the stories of olden times flow like an incessant current wherefrom I know not. Let Rani write them and these will remain."

With broken pieces, Dadamashai would create figures, decorate toys and spend hour after hour with them. Turning them this side and that, he looked at them in the morning light and sunset glow. He added to them this or that, scraped here and there and frolicked with them in a variety of ways. A dog made out of the roots of a tree used to sit at the feet of Dadamashai like a twisted coil. It was tied to Dadamashai's chair with a chain. One day a toy was stolen. Nowhere could it be found. It vanished from the stool where it was set close to Dadamashai's chair. We became quite offended with the thief, but Dadamashai said, "A toy is a covetable thing. To see it makes your hands tingle. Whoever stole it must have liked the toy and has the eye to appreciate beauty. The toy was good indeed."

That day at noon when everyone was deep in slumber, a monkey got into Didima's chamber through the window that opened on the bathing yard. Looking here and there he jumped onto the top of one of Didima's almirahs. A few wooden images were attached to the top of the almirah. One of those images was missing for some time. The monkey took up another image and vanished among the branches of a big mango tree. Now we understood who the thief was. Dadamashai said, "Search well. He must have stolen my toy too. Shame! At last a monkey liked my work of art!" Then he burst into laughter. Later the toy and the images were recovered from the monkey.

Next day the maternal grandmother was lying on a cot with her

eyes shut. She was feeling sleepy. Bipin's wife often came to massage Didima's feet. She felt in her sleep that Bipin's wife was rubbing her feet softly. Opening her eyes abruptly she saw that her feet were being massaged by a monkey instead of Bipin's wife. Getting alarmed she shouted and the monkey fled. Dadamashai was dozing in a chair close by her. Taken aback he said, "The monkey must have come to ask for toys again. How he implored by touching her feet! Wait, I will make a few monkey-toys for him!" He then made a few toys suitable for monkeys and placed them near the window that opened on the bathing yard. For a long time the toys were kept like that, but the monkey did not come back to collect them.

It seemed as if the days of Jorasanko went on as before. Months passed and years too. Where then was the trouble? However, Dadamashai sensed it. The rift was already there and the disintegration started. Just as the great world war indicated imminent crumbling of the world's civilization, perhaps the change of an epoch, so Jorasanko faced a similar decay.

Time was passing by in this way when one day came the last call of Kattababa. Being ill at Santiniketan he came back to his own house in Jorasanko to attain eternal peace. Dadamashai was sitting in the northern veranda of our House No. 5 casting his glance toward House No. 6. On the space between the two houses a multitude of men were waiting breathlessly for the last moment. Somebody came and said, "Please take your bath and have your lunch." For a moment Dadamashai looked at his face, then said, "Do you think I am not going to eat? Sitting here in this house I have been a witness of many deaths and many bereavements. Go now. I shall be bathing and eating in time." Long afterwards, he rose, took his bath and ate lunch. After lunch, sitting on a cane chair, when he was about to chew a betel leaf, just then came the news that the sun (Rabi) had set. The betel leaf was left untouched.

Then with a piece of paper and colour, he painted Rabindranath's last journey on the crest of a sea of multitude.

After a few days the very old swing of the swing garden – the huge wooden swing which belonged to the days of Girindranath or Dwarakanath and on which whoever went to Jorasanko and every guest of that house enjoyed dangling, suddenly broke into two. We considered it as our boat for dangling in the air. We felt as if the boat

split into two. Dadamashai ordered to keep the two pieces with great care. The wood itself was wonderful. It was as long as thirty arms' length and could accommodate twenty to twenty-five children together. If we all pushed it, it jumped like a spring. Long afterwards *Baramama*<sup>4</sup> preserved it in his Santiniketan house by making a bench with that wood.

Now the idea of selling the house gained prominence. One day, Dadamashai's dwarfish tamarind tree – a thing of pride of which he was hopeful that it would bear smallish tamarinds – died. Dadamashai's eyes were full of tears. He placed in another tub the crooked branch of the tree, black and dry. He put upon it the image of Lord Krishna carved out of the broken branch and beneath it a group of his companion milkmaids. For so long he played with the 'bonsai' of the living tamarind tree; now he began the game of *kutum-katam* with its dry branches.

Because of the war, things were getting more expensive. The price of land and house was also rising. The pressure of selling the house was becoming more insistent. Some said, "The time is not ripe for selling the house. Let the price of land become prohibitive so that by selling the property, our debts may be paid off and we might even retain some money in our hands. Don't sell the house now." Dadamashai agreed saying, "It's right, indeed. What's the hurry?"

It happened during the First World War as well. They had waited for the price to rise, but it did not; and so the house could not be sold. What was the harm if that happened this time too? But that was not to be. There was rift in the mind of Jorasanko. Residents were eager to sell the old house and go out in search of a new one. Let it be in a lane, or a narrow passage or wherever it be, but not in Jorasanko anymore. How long could Dadamashai resist them? Mejdadamashai was too weak to offer such resistance and Bardadamashai was no more. Therefore, the thought of selling the house was gathering strength.

When the idea of selling of the house began to float, several books vanished from the almirah of the library. No shawls, no ornaments or jewellery, no watches or rings were taken – only books. Books were often found missing in the past, but never stolen from the almirah.

<sup>4</sup> *Baramama* – eldest maternal uncle

Now burglars entered into the domain of *Saraswati*<sup>5</sup> in Jorasanko, and this was an unlucky sign. This presaged our leaving of the house. It was decided that since the books were vanishing, it would be better to sell them. Books were piled up in rows on the floor of two rooms. A broker came and inspected them. Then one day the floor of the two rooms became empty. Dadamashai sorted out just a few books for himself, and others too kept a few more. The rooms were now all dreary and deserted.

Old furniture was mostly sold. Some was kept by the Dadamashais. Then, one day, Kanakmama and his family left the house, that part of the second floor which was full of grandeur from the time of Dwarakanath, where Dwarakanath had laid great parties and where only lately were celebrated marriage parties decorated with marigold – that part now lay completely vacant.

After some time Mejdadamashai went away, deserting the rest of the second floor. The second floor became all bare. There was no illumination at night. Doors and windows were not opened by day. Yet from time to time a peculiar sound seemed to come out of the deserted house. Some people seemed to be moving above. One evening I heard a thudding noise coming from above. At first I took it for a misapprehension of the mind. But it was heard once again. The house itself seemed to be shaking with the sound and we felt annoyed. However, we could not understand what it was. It must be a thief in our second floor, we thought, and perhaps he was breaking something, throwing it on the floor. What could be there in the empty rooms? Attempting to penetrate above to the second and third floors, we saw only dense darkness. Then we decided that some of us should go upstairs. Dadamashai put a torch in my hand. With the torch in hand, we went up to the roof of the third floor, following the sound. Focusing the torch we saw that our servant Santosh was standing ghost-like in a corner. He had in his hands a bundle of iron bars. In order to sell them, he was collecting the iron bars by breaking the protective walls on the roof. He was striking them with an iron rod so as to bring them out of the wall, and that generated the sound. In the hazy darkness of the roof, it seemed as if Santosh was bringing out the ribs of our house with the tongs and the house was groaning in pain. Upon his seeing us, the bars fell off from his hand.

<sup>5</sup> *Saraswati* – the goddess of learning

Santosh could never have thought of doing such a thing in ordinary circumstances. But the atmosphere of Jorasanko House was so queer at that time that its inmates appeared to have lost their humanity. We had scolded Santosh, saying, "Whether you steal or commit dacoity, whether you will suffer the consequences of your own actions is better known to you. But Dadamashai is still living in this house. It will not be endured if you bring harm to the house while he is present."

We told everything to Dadamashai. Hearing all he said, "What can you do, my dear?" Then pointing to a wall, he said, "Look!" We shuddered to see that darkening the wall rows of ants were coming down from above. The ants had sensed that there were no men in the third floor. Who knows in what cracks and crevices the ants used to dwell? Nobody knows how old the ants were, to what generation they belonged! So long they lived with the inmates of the house. Now as the inmates had departed, the ants were also going away. Rows of black ants fled, leaving the third floor. I have never seen such a sight. For several days, the stream of black ants flowed down along the wall.

One or two furniture were sent in turn to Gupta Nibas at Baranagar. Dadamashai was going to reside there, leaving his parental house. He said, "I am going to live a secret life in a forest-house away from the view of men. Don't forget to take Dwarakanath's clock with care. Place it very carefully because it is a living clock and it has eyes. It beholds and knows whatever happens to us." He had unbounded love for the clock with a pendulum hanging from it. He added, "Once or twice it so happened when somebody died in our house, it stopped for the time being."

One day the southern veranda became completely vacant. The bedsteads and tables of Bardadamashai and Mejdadamashai had already been transferred to the other house. Dadamashai's desk, table and chair were sent to Baranagar. Finding the vacant veranda, that overly enthusiastic new bearer brightened its red floor by constant rubbing. Notwithstanding the big cracks here and there, the veranda seemed to be adorned with a new dress. Its age seemed to have been reduced. Dadamashai came to the veranda. Standing before its big opening, he looked at the garden for some time. Then gradually he sat down on the clean and cool floor. Spreading his arms on both

sides and touching the floor, he was looking for a long time at the old trees in the garden through the openings of the artistic design of the railing.

The estate's servants were being released from their duties, one after another. No one had any job in Jorasanko House. Only, on the day when Dadamashai was going to leave the house, the sweepers of the house with their children in hand surrounded Dadamashai and said, "How could you go away without making any arrangement for us?" They were reared in the Jorasanko House for several generations. Their birth, growth and death took place in that house. The dwelling place of the sweepers was under a huge tamarind tree to the northern end of their area.

It was not so easy to make arrangements for them. Who could do this since the masters were no longer there? Dadamashai said, "Come to Baranagar - I shall settle you there." However, the sweepers did not stir. They remained clinging to the habitation and the house of our ancestors. Dadamashai got into the car. Leaving behind the Jorasanko House, crossing Dwarakanath Thakur Lane, his car moved on towards the new house to the north of Calcutta.

There ended that chapter of the history of Jorasanko House and its southern veranda.

### Relevant references

Abinashbabu	Abinash Chandra Chakraborty (son of the poet Biharilal Chakraborty)
Aru-da	Arunendranath Thakur
Acharya	South Indian carpenter
Arati	Arati Mukhopadhyay (Thakur)
A maternal cousin (sister)	Diba (Bubu)
Okakura	Japanese artist
Kattababa	Rabindranath Thakur
Kanakmama	Kanakendranath Thakur (son of Gaganendranath Thakur)
Katstuta	Japanese artist
Carmichael	Lord Carmichael
Kalumama	Jayindranath Thakur (son of Samarendranath Thakur)
Kasahara	Japanese garden artist
Kishoribabu	Manager
Kumud	Kumud Chandra Pal
Kokomama	Tarunendranath Thakur (son of Abanindranath Thakur)
Kshitish	Kshitish Chandra Dasgupta (Superintendent)
Khuki Masi	Surupa Mukhopadhyay (daughter of Abanindranath Thakur)
Gabamama	Bratindranath Thakur (son of Samarendranath Thakur)
Giridhari	Giridhari Mahapatra (sculptor)
Gunibabu	Manager
Gopalbabu	Manager
Golap	Student of Santiniketan school
Ghentu	Son of a neighbour
Charitra	Servant
Charudidi	Charubala Ray

Jagadanandababu	Jagadananda Ray
Jasimuddin	Poet Jasimuddin
Typhan	Japanese artist
Tarak	Tarakanath Lahiri (student of Santiniketan school)
Talabali	Muslim cook
Tota	Son of Phanibhusan Mukhopadhyay
Dadamashai	Abanindranath Thakur
Didima	Suhasini Devi
Dinumama	Dinendranath Thakur
Dipali	Dipali Ray (Thakur)
Dipu-da	Dwipendranath Thakur
Duhkhi	Servant
Dwarkanath	Prince Dwarkanath Thakur
Nanda-da	Nandalal Basu
Nabin	Muslim cook
Nabu-mama	Nabendranath Thakur (son of Gaganendranath Thakur)
Nirmal	Nirmal Chandra Chattopadhyay (student of Santiniketan school)
Nitu	Grandson of Rabindranath Thakur
Pacha-babu	Manager
Punna-babu	Purna Chandra Saha (neighbour)
Pradyot Kumar	Maharaj Pradyot Kumar Thakur
Pramatha-babu	Pramathanath Bishi
Prashanta-babu	Prashanta Kumar Ray
Phani-babu	Phanibhushan Mukhopadhyay (superintendent)
Bardadamashai	Gaganendranath Thakur
Baro-mama	Alokendranath Thakur (son of Abanindranath Thakur)
Baba	Manilal Gangopadhyay
Foreign Guru	Italian artist Gillardi and English artist Palmer
Bipin	Servant
Biswambhar	<i>Hooka</i> -bearer
Benthal	Sir Arthur Benthal
Grandma of Benepukur	Sunayani Devi (sister of Abanindranath Thakur)

Montague	Edwin Montague
Monoranjan-babu	Manager
Mahabir	Servant
Mahendra Daktar	Doctor Mahendranath Bandopadhyay
Markandi	Student of Santiniketan school
Mastermashai	Jatindranath Bandopadhyay
Mishir	Driver
Mukul-babu	Mukul Chandra Dey
Muller sahib	Swedish businessman and art connoisseur
Mejdadamashai	Samarendranath Thakur
Mejo-didima	Nishibala Devi
'Mejo-jiyatha'	Satyendranath Thakur
Jogi	Gardener
Radharaman Ray	Engineer Radharaman Ray
Radhu	Radhakanta Biswas (servant)
Ranidi	Rani Chanda
Reading	Lord Reading
Ronaldshay	Lord Ronaldshay
Santi	Santidev Ghosh
Shovanlal	Shovanlal Gangopadhyay
Sridhar	Sridhar Mahapatra (sculptor)
Sardar	Gardener
Santosh	Servant
Sanosan	Japanese wrestler
Sujan	Sujanendranath Thakur
Suren-dada	Surendranath Thakur
Hari	Japanese artist
Haricharan	Artist who worked with casts and moulds
Haridas	Maid servant
Harinath-babu	Harinath Bandopadhyay (Manager)
Hebi	Gitindranath Thakur

